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Welcome to the latest edition of the United Nations Newsletter in Liberia, where we bring you a diverse array of stories reflecting the dynamic tapestry of progress, resilience, and collaboration in this nation. In this edition, we delve into the vital realms of elections reporting with the National Elections Commission (NEC) and media, explore the inspiring journey of individuals like Esther, who triumphed over severe malnutrition, and Natasha, who transformed from a school dropout to a successful entrepreneur. We highlight the importance of prioritizing breastfeeding for healthy future generations, share the often-overlooked perspectives of midwives, and spotlight the transformative initiatives of the Spotlight Initiative in renovating Criminal Court E in Lofa County. From empowering forest and farm producers to supporting independent candidates and addressing youth skills development, this edition is a testament to the multifaceted efforts toward sustainable development. Join us as we celebrate achievements, confront challenges, and work together towards a brighter future for Liberia.

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NEC, Media Validate and Adopt Code of Conduct for Elections Reporting

Galaxy A51

Photo Credits: UNDP Liberia

The National Elections Commission (NEC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on Monday, July 17, opened a three-day media workshop in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, for the validation and adoption of the Media Code of Conduct for the 2023 General Elections.

When validated, the code of conduct will help prevent or minimize the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech, provide equal voices for candidates, and ensure a level playing field during the electoral process.

Speaking at the opening, the Deputy Executive Director of Programs of NEC, Attorney Nathan Garbie, said the gathering is significant for the professional and ethical coverage of the October 10 General Elections. While recognizing the media's role in informing and educating the citizenry, Attorney Garbie described the Code of Conduct as a cardinal document that will guide media reportage and conduct during the elections.



Photo Credits: UNDP Liberia

The President of the Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FEJAL), Siatta Scott Johnson, admonished the participants to develop a revised code that all media institutions and practitioners will abide by during the electoral process.

The Executive Director of the Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP), Malcolm Joseph, reminded the participants of their professional obligation to work towards strengthening democracy and promoting peaceful and credible elections.

The Political Parties' Campaign Finance Specialist of UNDP Liberia Electoral Support Project (LESP), Aagon Tingba emphasized that a well-trained and informed media plays a critical role in informing and educating the citizenry on electoral issues in an objective manner.

Journalist Frank Sainworla, Managing Director of Public Trust Media Initiative, urged the participants to pay keen attention to social media during the deliberations. He demanded that social media come under scrutiny due to its growing influence on the population.

In the run-up to the October elections, UNDP/ LESP, with funding from Sweden, Ireland, and the European Union, provides technical and financial support to NEC to validate the media code.

The code was developed by NEC, in collaboration with the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), the Reporters Association of Liberia, and the Female Journalists Association of Liberia, to regulate the conduct of journalists while covering the electoral process.

The code of conduct is revised and validated during every general election by representatives of the media.

The first phase of the workshop, which will convene from July 17 - 19 - brought together 40 managers and senior editors of various media institutions from Grand Bassa, Rivercess, Margibi, Montserrado, Bomi, Cape Mount, and Gbarpolu counties.

The second phase, slated for July 21 to 23, will gather journalists from Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Rivergee, Grand Kru, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, and Sinoe counties.

The Workshop will highlight topics on the Signs and Dangers of Misinformation; Disinformation, Mal-information and Hate Speech in the 2023 Elections; and the Structure and Mandate of NEC. Others include Gender Responsive Reporting on Women in Politics, Preventing Conflict Through Professional Reporting, and Hearing and Complaint Procedures.





Esther's Story: From Severe Malnutrition to a Healthy Life

Photo Credits: UNICEF Liberia

Esther's smile could light up a room as she giggled and cooed during her follow-up visit to the Ganta community clinic. At just nine months old, Esther had already faced significant health challenges, including severe acute malnutrition. Her grandfather, Wotoe Dahn, who works as a registrar at the clinic, explained that Esther's health had deteriorated rapidly until they sought help at the clinic.

With trained health workers and nutrition interventions in place, the clinic was able to diagnose and treat Esther's malnutrition. Screener Teewon Karnue noted that Esther was so weak and thin when she arrived that many people in the community doubted that she would survive. However, Esther gradually gained strength and weight, eventually reaching a healthy 5 kg and being discharged from the program.

Unfortunately, Esther's relapse was a reminder that addressing malnutrition requires ongoing support and education. Mr. Karnue explained that Esther's grandparents, who were raising her after the loss of her mother and twin sister, were struggling to provide adequate complementary feeding due to their low income. However, with counseling and education from the clinic, Esther's grandparents learned to incorporate a variety of foods, including plantains, papayas, and eggs, into her diet. The clinic also provided micronutrient powder and vitamins to support Esther's nutritional needs.

Esther's story is just one example of the life-saving impact of nutrition interventions in Liberia, co-funded by Power of Nutrition and the Government of Ireland. Through UNICEF's partnership with Action Against Hunger and the Government of Liberia, these interventions are implemented at the county level to identify and treat malnourished children like Esther.

Mr. Dahn expressed gratitude for the support Esther received and emphasized the need for continued investment in local communities. "We don't have much here," he said, "but if we could get seed and tools to plant a garden and grow our food to feed children like Esther, it will really help." Esther's story is a reminder that addressing malnutrition requires ongoing support and investment, but the impact on children's lives can be truly transformative.



Natasha's Journey from School Dropout to Entrepreneur

Photo Credit: UNICEF Liberia

Natasha B. Robertson was a 17-year-old girl who had dropped out of high school and was living on the streets of Monrovia, Liberia. She had been brought to the city from the rural area with the promise of a better education, but instead she was forced to work long hours selling goods on the street and rarely attended school.

Natasha was resistant to change when she first joined the Let Us Learn programme, a UNICEF-supported program that provides education and skills training to out-of-school children and youth in Liberia. She missed her old friends and didn't see the point in going back to school.

But with the help of the peer educators, social workers, and guidance counsellors in the program, Natasha slowly started to turn her life around. She re-enrolled in high school and began attending regularly. She also started taking classes in pastry making, which she had always been interested in.

Natasha's hard work paid off. She graduated from high school and completed her pastry class as one of the top students. She is now a successful pastry chef and owns her own business in Caldwell. She is also a role model for other adolescent girls who have faced challenges in their lives. She aspires to go to the university in the near future.

Natasha's story is a reminder that it is never too late to turn your life around. With hard work and determination, anything is possible.

The Let Us Learn programme is a UNICEF-supported program that provides education and skills training to out-of-school children and youth in Liberia. The program is designed to help young people like Natasha get back on track and complete their education. The program also provides skills training in areas such as carpentry, tailoring, and hairdressing. This helps young people to find employment and become self-sufficient.

The Let Us Learn programme is making a real difference in the lives of young people in Liberia. It is helping them to get an education, learn skills, and build a better future for themselves.



Vice President Dr. Jewel Howard Taylor urges the public to prioritize breastfeeding for healthy future generations

Photo Credit: WHO Liberia

Monrovia, 14 August 2023 - In celebration of Liberia's observance of World Breastfeeding Week, the Vice President of the Republic of Liberia Chief Dr. Jewel Howard Taylor who is also Liberia's WHO 75 Health Champion is advocating for enhanced support for breastfeeding mothers across the nation. The week-long event, which commenced on August 14, and extends until August 2023, 19, is focused on promoting breastfeeding within workplaces to bolster child survival.

Addressing the significance of this year's World Breastfeeding Week theme, "Let's make breastfeeding at work, work," Her Excellency, Chief Dr. Taylor underlined the critical nature of maintaining a balance between nurturing infants and pursuing careers. "Women should not be given the option to either choose between breastfeeding their babies and keeping their jobs. It is possible to harmonize both aspects for the betterment of our society," said Vice President Taylor.

Madam Vice President Dr. Taylor, a staunch advocate for maternal and child health, affirmed the importance of breastfeeding as a fundamental step toward ensuring the well-being of both mothers and infants. "This simple act of breastfeeding babies, yields life-long health benefits for both infants and their mothers. The nutrients and immunity provided through breastfeeding during the first six months are indispensable for optimal growth and development," she stated.

Highlighting the critical role of breast milk in preventing life-threatening illnesses, such as pneumonia and diarrhea, Vice President Taylor reiterated the scientific evidence supporting the benefits of breastfeeding. "It is crucial to understand that breastfeeding contributes to brain development and immunity, and it protects babies from stunting and other ailments," she noted.

Vice President Taylor expressed concern over current statistics indicating that over 50 percent of mothers globally do not breastfeed their babies, contributing to malnutrition and, in many cases, untimely deaths of under-five children. She emphasized, "Breastfeeding not only helps prevent diarrhea and pneumonia, which are life-threatening illnesses to children under five, but it also helps reduce mothers' risk of ovarian and breast cancer."

The Vice President Dr. Taylor highlighted that according to Liberia's current laws, maternity leave stands at three months. Drawing from her personal experience, she encouraged mothers to go beyond the ordinary to ensure their babies receive adequate nutrition during the crucial initial months. "I was a student at the University of Liberia. So, what I used to do is, I would get up in the morning and squeezed six to seven bottles of breast milk and leave them," she stated that she breastfed her son for a whole year and this was based on pieces of advice from her mother, who was a nurse. She emphasized that the breast milk has all the nutrients that the child needs to develop fully.

Vice President Taylor stressed the importance of advocacy and education to dispel misconceptions surrounding breastfeeding. She called for the involvement of community health workers to disseminate accurate information and to promote behavioral change at the grassroots level. "We must engage in extensive advocacy, training, and information-sharing to address mothers' perceptions about breastfeeding and foster positive change," she emphasized. She stressed the need for additional endeavors to alter certain perceptions about breastfeeding held by women. Revealing that some women decide early in their pregnancies not to breastfeed due to concerns about their breast appearance, Vice President Taylor stated, "When you are talking about having a baby, it goes beyond you, because you are now bringing a whole new life to bear and it is totally impossible to worry about yourself, that baby becomes a priority. So, if you don't want your breasts to drop, don't have any children."

As Liberia joins the global community in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week, Vice President Taylor called on all stakeholders to support the government's initiatives aimed at promoting early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding. In conclusion she called on stake holders to make breastfeeding a priority, "Let us unite to prioritize breastfeeding as a means to secure the health and future of our children and mothers. Through collaborative efforts, we can create an environment where breastfeeding at work truly works, benefiting families, employers, and society as a whole."

In the last decade, countries like Cote d'Ivoire, the Marshall Islands, the Philippines, Somalia, and Viet Nam have achieved significant increases in breastfeeding rates, illustrating that progress is attainable through the protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding. Research indicates that although breastfeeding rates notably decline for women upon their return to work, this adverse effect can be counteracted by workplaces facilitating ongoing breastfeeding for mothers. Family-friendly workplace policies, encompassing features such as paid maternity leave, breastfeeding breaks, and designated spaces for breastfeeding or expressing milk, foster an environment that benefits not only employed women and their families, but also employers. These policies yield economic dividends by curbing maternity-related absences, enhancing the retention of female staff, and mitigating the expenses linked to hiring and training new personnel. Supportive workplaces play a crucial role in striving for the global 2030 exclusive breastfeeding target of 70 percent. Globally, the world commemorates World Breastfeeding Week from August 1st to 7th each year.



“We deliver more than babies, yet we are less recognized among health professionals” ...Says a midwife in Liberia

Photo Cred: UN Liberia

BENSONVILLE, Liberia - “There is still so much work to be done to improve Liberia’s maternal and newborn health situation. While there has been an improvement in antenatal visits and facility deliveries by pregnant women, there is a lack of the workforce to attend to the needs of these women adequately,” says Deddeh Tamba, a midwife at the Bensonville Hospital, Montserrado County.

Ms. Tamba states that midwives remain among Liberia’s least-paid health sector cadre. “We deliver more than babies. Midwives are responsible for antenatal, intrapartum, and postpartum care for women. We attend to women who want to plan their pregnancies. We step in and attend to inpatients when nurses are not around. Yet we receive less pay than other health professionals in Liberia,” says Ms. Tamba.

Ms. Deddeh Tamba attends to a client with the desire to prevent unplanned pregnancy. @UNFPA Liberia/Calixte S. Hessou
Ms. Deddeh Tamba attends to a client with the desire to prevent unplanned pregnancy. @UNFPA Liberia/Calixte S. Hessou
However, Ms. Tamba says the limited incentives do not dampen her passion and commitment to ensuring quality care for pregnant women and their newborns.

“I became a midwife not for financial or material gains but because of my passion for the profession. For example, I spend more than 25 percent of my monthly salary on transportation alone to commute between my residence and the health facility. But I care less as helping women to deliver babies safely brings me joy and a complete sense of fulfillment.

The need for more midwives

It is estimated that Liberia has only one midwife or nurse to about 2000 population, making it one of the countries with a low midwife-to-population ratio. And most of these midwives or nurses work in urban areas - compounding the situation for rural women. Limited incentives and opportunities for career growth have been one of the driving forces behind the concentration of skilled birth attendants in urban communities in Liberia.

Ms. Tamba wants Liberia to prioritize the training and retention of midwives within health policies, budgets, and programmes.

While there has been an increase in births assisted by skilled attendants, from 61 percent in 2013 to 84 percent in 20-2019, mothers and newborns remain at risk in Liberia as approximately 742 mothers die of causes related to pregnancy and childbirth for every 100,000 live births because of limited access to either basic midwifery or emergency obstetric care, such as cesarean sections. The lack of trained midwives in most rural health facilities and the long distances women travel to access care hinders the country’s efforts to reduce maternal and newborn mortality.

Investing in midwives

Working in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund is supporting the training of midwives in Liberia.

“I commend the important work of midwives. Midwives deliver – and not only babies. They save lives and promote good health in society. They are an essential workforce in an effective healthcare system,” says UNFPA Liberia Resident Representative Bidisha Pillai.

The Fund has supported the Liberia Board of Nursing and Midwifery to develop a direct-entry curriculum and a bridging programme for existing midwives at the bachelor’s degree level to ensure a clear career pathway for midwives.

The UN Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency also supports regular capacity building for the Midwifery Association to embark on a midwifery-led emergency obstetric and newborn care (EmONC) mentorship program.



Photo Cred: UNDP Liberia



Photo Cred: UNDP Liberia

Government and Partners, Including UNDP, announce third phase startup business plan competition



Photo Cred: UNDP Liberia

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry in partnership with the Business Startup Center (BSC) Monrovia, with support from UNDP through the Livelihood & Employment Creation project, announces the commencement of the third phase of the Youth Startup Business Plan Competition 2023 cohort for ambitious young people interested in starting their own businesses.

The Competition targets 300 youth drawn from seven counties: Montserrado, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe, Nimba, and Lofa counties, who will participate in two days of business skills training, and competition for business start-up grants of USD500.

The youth will learn about business and financial planning and present their business ideas to a panel of judges in the hope of securing grants of up to five hundred United States dollars (US\$ 500.00). They will also benefit from coaching and mentorship support when developing and refining their business ideas.

The competition aims to foster entrepreneurship among Liberia's youth, identifying their needs and challenges, and developing innovative and creative solutions.

Submission of applications begins on 16 August and runs up to 27, August 2023.

It is expected that applicants will come forward with business ideas from all sectors of the economy including agriculture, information technology, transportation, food processing, manufacturing, health, and along all value chains about the key sectors.

UNDP and the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Commerce and Industry are working to support the development of a strong and vibrant private sector through business development that is aimed at contributing to poverty reduction and the empowerment of young people and People Living with Disabilities (PWDs).

In 2022, the Business Plan Competition attracted 954 applications from the targeted seven counties. The best 300 applicants were invited to the business skills and pitch training.

All 300 entrepreneurs/businesses accessed grants up to US\$ 500 to start and expand their enterprises in agriculture, information technology, transportation, food processing, manufacturing, etc.

These businesses are expanding their operations, creating income and employment opportunities, and providing goods/services to their clients while contributing to economic growth and development.

All applicants are advised to apply with a registered mobile money number in their names. Applicants will be required to submit a national identification card before participating in the Business and Financial Skills Training. Female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply.

Applicants who have benefited from the last two cohorts of the business plan competition are not eligible to apply for this competition.



Spotlight Initiative

To eliminate violence against women and girls

Spotlight Initiative Renovates Criminal Court E in Lofa County with EU funding

Photo Credit: Spotlight Initiative

Spotlight Initiative in Liberia implemented by the Government of Liberia, with funding from the European Union through UNDP, has handed over the newly renovated Criminal Court E in Lofa County to the Government of Liberia.

The handover ceremony held August 2023, 14, at the Judiciary Circuit Court in Voinjama, Lofa County, represents a significant milestone in Liberia's pursuit of justice, human rights protection, and legal infrastructure advancement.

Criminal Court E, a crucial pillar in Liberia's justice system, has undergone extensive refurbishment aimed at creating an improved and conducive environment for the fair and efficient handling of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) related cases.

The renovation project included the establishment of an in-camera victim protection room, prioritizing the rights and privacy of survivors during trial proceedings.

The handover ceremony witnessed the formal transfer of responsibility and ownership of Criminal Court E from UNDP to the Government of Liberia. It serves as a success to the joint efforts and commitment to strengthening Liberia's justice system, as well as advancing the protection of vulnerable individuals' rights, particularly survivors of SGBV.

Speaking during the ceremony, the Assistant Court Administrator Counselor William Kollie urged party litigants to make use of Criminal Court E in settling SGBV cases, instead of their homes.

Counselor Kollie expressed appreciation to the European Union (EU) and its partners including UNDP, for the support and reaffirmed the Judiciary's commitment to the training of its staff as it is a specialized area of work to uphold the confidentiality of the court.

Also making remarks at the event, UNDP Liberia Pillar Head for its Inclusive Governance Portfolio James Monibah, stressed that the renovation of the court is part of the agency's overall support to the Government of Liberia in strengthening access to Justice and the Rule of law especially addressing sexual violence.

Monibah urged the citizens, to report cases of rape and reiterated that it should not be made a home matter. He reminded the Judiciary of its responsibility to take care of the assets and sustain the programme and

the CSOs to increase awareness and engagement with the communities on SGBV issues.

The CSO Coordinator of PYCOSI Liberia working in Lofa County, Mohammed Kamara emphasized the need for increased support to the witness protection programme.

Kamara said the absence of witnesses especially with the difficult economic situation in the country, is one of the contributing factors to delays in the judicial process of SGBV cases.

On behalf of the Gender theme group, Beatrice Kanneh reiterated the need for citizens to trust the system by reporting cases of sexual violence. "The Court will help us protect the identity of survivors and bring dignity to them," Kanneh noted.

The handover of the renovated Criminal Court E represents a significant step forward for Liberia's justice system and its dedication to safeguarding the rights of its citizens. This event marks a clear demonstration of collective efforts in promoting access to justice, protecting the vulnerable, and ensuring that the voices of survivors are heard, and their rights upheld.

The event recognizes and appreciates the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders involved, including the European Union/United Nations Spotlight Initiative, UNDP, government officials, judiciary representatives, Civil Society Organizations, and community members, who contributed to the rehabilitation and refurbishment of Criminal Court E.

Within the Spotlight Initiative in Liberia, UNDP works to strengthen institutions to deliver quality and essential services in the prevention and response to Sexual and Gender Based Violence and harmful practices at the national, sub-national, and community levels.

The Spotlight Initiative funded by the European Union, is a multi-national partnership designed to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as increase access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services. The United Nations System implements various activities under the Programme.



FAO Empowers Forest and Farm Producers in Liberia to Promote Climate Resilient Landscape and Improved Livelihoods

Photo Credit: UN Liberia

Monrovia - Forest and farm producers and their organizations play a crucial role as change agents in sustainable natural resource management and climate-resilient landscape development.

Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been engaging with forest communities in Lofa, Gbarpolu and Nimba Counties in Liberia in an effort to contribute to the improvement of sustainable charcoal production, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) harvesting, sustainable forest resource management, and a healthy environment, which in turn leads to improved livelihoods.

Between 19 and 22 July 2023, FAO conducted a field mission to the project sites, where beneficiary meetings, NTFPs experience-sharing dialogue, and Market Analysis and Development training were held.

Promoting Sustainable Charcoal Production

FAO, in partnership with the National Charcoal Union of Liberia (NACUL), has promoted sustainable charcoal production and provided support to establish a woodlot containing over 2,000 seedlings on 2.5 hectares in Kpayaqulleh, Lofa County.

"We appreciate this support so highly, and as the woodlot is being turnover, I can assure that the association will take ownership and will work tirelessly in making sure that woodlot is maintained," said the head of the association. "Many projects have come to our community, and eventually, after few months, it collapses. However, for what I see from this project, it is resilient and I am very interested in being part of the association," asserted the assistant Town Chief of Kpayaqulleh.

This nursery site is one of the four nursery sites that FAO supports under the project, which is backed by the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) in Liberia. The project coordinator also conducted monitoring visits to the other three sites located in Twah River, Yemah, and Gbehlay-Geh districts in Nimba County where he found that the seedlings of the nursery were of quality and plants growing very well. Additionally, associations are taking ownership of the nursery through the responsibility of the transplanting of the seedling and maintenance of the land provided.

Empowering Non-Timber Forest Product Harvesters

During the knowledge-sharing session in Ganta in Nimba County, 20 representatives from various NTFP producers' associations exchanged experiences and lessons learned with each other on sustainable harvesting, value addition and processing of NTFPs.

"Let me appreciate FAO for the exchange visit. Neither did I know the importance of the Gain of Paradise (GOP) until we travelled to Cote d'Ivoire for the exchange visit. With the knowledge gained, I can now cultivate more of the GOP and provide support to my fellow community members on the cultivation and harvesting of this NTFPs" said the representative of the Botanical Product Association of Liberia (BOTPAL), an implementing partner under this project.

One of the representatives from Gbehlay-Geh NTFP association shared her knowledge on the Gain of Paradise (GOP) as one of the NTFPs that learned it from the earlier cross-border study tour undertaken in Cote d'Ivoire. GOP, as she spoke, is a spice and a seed of Aframomum melegueta, which is native to West Africa and can be a source of income among the forest communities.

"Value addition plays a pivotal role in increasing the economic value prospects of a product. Therefore, it is important that we encourage not only the sustainable management and harvesting of NTFPs by FFPOs but also the value addition and quality processing. FAO will continue to empower forest and farm producers, fostering a future that embraces both environmental stewardship and thriving livelihoods," said Marvees Weah, National Forestry and Natural Resources Management Consultant at FAO Representation in Liberia.

FAO recognizes that collaboration has been a cornerstone in this journey towards positive change and continues to drive forward in partnership with local organizations and communities to ensure our collective efforts cultivate healthier environments and improved livelihoods for all.



Photo Credit: UN Liberia

Independent Aspirants for the 10 October 2023 General Elections Friday, July 21st 2023 signed the historic Farmington River Declaration committing themselves to ensure that the election is conducted free of violence. Political Parties have also signed the Farmington River Declaration.

The colorful program held at the Ministerial Complex in Congo Town was under the direct auspices of the National Elections Commission (NEC), in collaboration with the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The Chairperson of the National Elections Commission, Madam Davidetta Browne Lansanah spoke about the need for all aspirants to respect the Commission and all of its Regulations and Guidelines as provided for under the law.

UN Resident Coordinator Christine Umutoni, speaking at the occasion, called on Liberians to ensure elections are peaceful. She reminded Liberians of the past election cycles that were held under a peaceful atmosphere which got international acclaim and was used as examples for other countries to emulate.



Liberian Farmers Receive Farming Equipment through the Accelerated Community Development Programme

Caption: UN RC Christine Umotoni and beneficiaries of project
Photo: © UNDP Liberia

UNDP, with support from the Liberian government, has donated equipment, basic farming tools and post-harvest processing machines to farmers in three of the 15 counties. The equipment aims to help enhance their labor capacity in making use of large-scale and a more mechanized approach to farming as compared to subsistence farming, which is more labor-intensive and time-consuming. The beneficiary counties include Bong, Rivercess, and Gbarpolu.

The equipment included 14 tractors and trailer, over 18,000 pieces of assorted basic farming tools, including rice, cassava, sugar cane milling machines, thirty-four sets of post-harvest processing machines, and a rice thresher were also turned over to the beneficiary communities at a ceremony on Thursday, July 21.

“The tools and equipment, valued at over US\$600,000, will add value and help expand the agricultural base of each of the communities, thereby addressing the ultimate challenge of food insecurity,” UNDP Liberia Resident Representative, Louis Kuukpen said at the event. “They will be distributed to identified cooperatives and individual farmers in beneficiary communities in the targeted counties.”

The Liberian agricultural sector, like many other African countries, is still faced with huge challenges, key among these being low productivity due to lack of innovation. Many African farmers are still engaged in subsistence farming due to lack of access to modern farming equipment – a situation that is contributing to the acute food insecurity on the continent.

The farming equipment and tools are donated under the auspices of Accelerated Community Development Programme (ACDP) – an ambitious five-year initiative launched by President George Weah in November 2022 with a commitment of 100 million United States Dollars for the first three years, 2025-2022.

President Weah, who launched the programme last year at the UN Day celebrations, noted that the ACDP will have an immediate impact on reducing poverty while accelerating socio-economic development in rural communities.

The ACDP is also expected to accelerate the repair of 39 handpumps and construction of 14 new handpumps and additional 5 solar powered multipurpose boreholes in new communities.

The programme will also construct storage and processing facilities fully equipped with offices for agricultural cooperatives; construct 10 decent gender sensitive toilets, and procure additional basic farming tools.



Liberia Celebrates World Youth Skills Day

Photo Credit UNIDO-Youth Rising project

Liberia joined the rest of the world to celebrate and commemorate World Youth Skills Day through the Liberian Business Idea competition.

It was an exciting event, with young Liberians showcasing their innovative ideas made possible with technical skills.

This event was organized under the Youth Rising Project, aiming to equip young people with essential skills for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship, in line with the United Nations General Assembly's declaration in 2014.

The theme for this year's World Youth Skills Day is "Skilling teachers, trainers, and youth for a transformative future." The focus is on recognizing the critical role that teachers, trainers, and educators play in providing skills training for youth, enabling them to transition into the labor market and actively engage in their communities and societies.

Assistant Minister of TVET at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Hon. Millias Z. Sheriff, provided an overview of the program, acknowledging the support from the EU-funded Youth Rising Project and the Swedish-funded supporting youth project. These initiatives aim to recognize and project skillful individuals in Liberia who are significant contributors to the vocational and technical training sectors.

In his speech, Hon. Millias Z. Sheriff expressed gratitude to the EU, Swedish government, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) for their proactive efforts and adherence to the project's design and targets. He also announced that an additional 28

million dollars would be allocated to include other schools across Liberia's 15 counties, ensuring that each county has a functioning TVET institution.

UNIDO also commended the Liberian government and the EU for their commitment to providing quality TVET training opportunities to the country's youth. This dedication seeks to create an enabling environment that promotes employment and sustainable development in Liberia.

The UN Resident Coordinator to Liberia emphasized the importance of investing in youth skills, emphasizing the significance of this year's theme, "Skilling teachers, trainers, and youth for a transformative future." By empowering the youth with relevant skills, Liberia can foster positive change and development for a prosperous future.

The celebration of World Youth Skills Day in Liberia serves as a testament to the nation's commitment to empowering its young population, providing them with the tools they need to succeed in the workforce and make meaningful contributions to society.

UN Human Security Trust Fund Project impacts communities in North Central Liberia



Photo Credit: UN Liberia

-Gbarnga Bong County

The United Nations in Liberia is jointly implementing the United Nations Human Security Trust Fund Project "Building Resilience of Youth, Women and Vulnerable Groups using Social Protection Floor with ITC". The project is being implemented by FAO, ILO, UNDP, UN Women and WFP, with support from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), in three counties in Liberia-Bong, Lofa and Nimba.

In this light, a three-day Human Security Workshop on Digital technology with emphasis on establishment of Smart Villages, kicked off yesterday in Gbarnga, Bong County with participants in high spirit.

The workshop, which takes place from July 11-July 13, is expected to bring together 40 participants from local authorities, facilitators and beneficiaries from the communities. The workshop hopes to deepen the understanding of Smart Villages and digital technology and explore its role in the broader development context, particularly in agriculture, health, finance and market.

"At the beginning of this project, we did not even know what the SDGs were but thanks to this project, we now know about the 17 sustainable development goals and how they impact our lives.", Ms Quinisia, Commissioner of Forquelleh, Bong County.

Another beneficiary expressed her appreciation for the impact of the project, "Thanks for giving our people the chance and means to cross the bridge of poverty and into prosperity". She noted that in her community, forty-two women, youth and persons with disabilities, can now manage financially because of the support through training and start-up capital provided by the initiative through the **Start and improve your Business (SIYB)** initiative.

The UN Resident Coordinator, Christine Umutoni, in her remarks during interaction with beneficiaries, encouraged them to strive for entrepreneurship. She noted that "no one can make Liberia better, besides Liberians themselves". She noted that entrepreneurial capacity of 264 vulnerable young women and men on how to start and improve their business have been built using the SIYB tools, 264 medium-size businesses have been established for inclusive economic and human

development in six of the nine selected project communities and an awareness sessions conducted on the concept and importance of human security and how to mainstream the concept in county and national development agenda.

She also acknowledged the efforts of the government of Liberia and the UN agencies for the progress of the project that covered the **wider consultations** with national and international stakeholders (Government, Private Sector, CSOs and ITU) on the SMART Village Concept, the conduct of **a digital assessment** in all three project communities with the objective of identify digital gaps and the infrastructure requirements for the implementation of the Smart Village Initiative, **field assessment** at the district and community level to identify and assess the existing conditions of beneficiaries and **community engagement workshop** on SDGs-related issues and how to digitally address them for inclusivity has been conducted.

She also stated "the SMART Village concept is where the digital technology will be used to promote community-driven e-agriculture (particularly weather and extension services) including food system planning, implementation, and management - education and skills development, livelihood strategies such as income generation, cooperative administration, and health service including health insurance for women, youths, and the vulnerable population. Given the importance of access to markets and finance services in rural communities, these will be given priority in the digital endeavor to be co-created by you all working with private and public sector digital technology actors."

The project will complement UNWOMEN Digital Platform – "Buy from Women" that connects smallholder farmers to information, finance, and markets – that is currently being developed.



Photo Credit: UN Liberia

UN Resident Coordinator urges political aspirants to conduct issue-based and violence-free campaigns

UN Resident Coordinator Christine N. Umutoni Wednesday urged presidential candidates in the 2023 General Elections to conduct an issue-based and violence-free campaign with respect for the laws of Liberia and abide by the principles of the Farmington River Declaration they signed.

The Farmington River Declaration, she said remains a blueprint for peaceful and credible elections, which is a trademark for peace, inclusivity, a symbol of zero tolerance for violence against anyone, and most importantly zero tolerance for violence against women.

She was speaking in Monrovia during a forum with 2023 presidential aspirants and members of the Board of Commissioners of the NEC, ECOWAS, and UN-Liberia on promoting peaceful 2023 elections.

RC Umutoni reminded that Liberians are not merely electing individuals but are shaping the direction of their country, saying it is the responsibility of every citizen to vote with an open heart and consider the long-time implications of their choices.

The UN, she reaffirmed believes that Liberia's progress depends not solely on the action of those who hold office but the collective spirit of understanding, and collaboration that each one of the candidates brings to ensure that the elections are conducted in an atmosphere of peace, inclusivity, and transparency. She said the UN system believes strongly in Liberia and the democratic ideals that the country upholds and is very happy to be working closely with ECOWAS and NEC.

RC Umutoni said presidential and Legislative elections are a moment of national pride when the citizens get to choose their leaders. She noted that the symbolic gesture of the gathering is a source of hope.

"In any country, elections are a critical period to demonstrate maturity. We have no doubt that as Liberia continues to be an example of peace in the region, the country will go through the elections successfully," she declared.

She said voters' confidence in the elections is crucial, adding that continuing to build trust in the electoral process for many individuals and groups remains critical.

She however pointed out that one of the drivers of decreased confidence in the electoral process is misinformation and disinformation. Online-based information, particularly social media, she warned has the potential to cause problems if not well utilized, confusing and overwhelming voters, thereby threatening to derail confidence in the conduct of the elections, NEC, and its work. She urged the responsible use of the media for the common good of the electoral process.

RC Umutoni commended the chairperson and the Board of Commissioners of the National Elections Commission (NEC) for their continuing efforts to reaffirm and demonstrate their independence and impartiality to strengthen public confidence in the commission and the electoral process.

RC Umutoni said NEC is taking proactive measures to turn the tide of voters' trust. as the elections approach, saying that increasing the confidence of all Liberians in all stages of the electoral process is very paramount.

RC Umutoni said the interactions among the candidates demonstrated the maturity of Liberians and congratulated them for the peaceful and cordial engagement, noting that to see candidates interact in a calm, peaceful, respectful, and friendly way is rare in the history of many elections.

UN Resident Coordinator urges political aspirants to conduct issue-based and violence-free campaigns

While expressing confidence that the interaction will not end in a symbolic gesture but continue throughout the electoral process, she stated that the messages of the candidates give confidence not only to Liberians and their followers but the international community.

"I congratulate all presidential candidates. Liberia has passionate individuals who have stepped forward to run for the highest office in the land. Each candidate represents a unique vision for his country's future," she stated.

As the campaign starts on August 6, she urged political parties and leaders to remember that in the midst of political events and various contrasting viewpoints, everyone is bound by the common desire and the pursuit for a better tomorrow and hence they must foster an environment where they can engage in meaningful, respectful, discussions, while challenging each other and keeping the ultimate goal of greater good for the country.

She admonished the candidates to do everything as part of their commitments to ensure increased women's participation and prevent violence against women. She also urged the inclusion of the youth and disabled in the political process.

While calling for a fair playing ground for everyone in the political process, she implored every candidate and citizen to commit to promoting positive and inclusive dialogue.

"Let us reject division and embrace the strength that comes from unity in diversity. By doing so we can truly exemplify the principles upon which this nation was founded. We must all stand together as one in this one Liberia, she concluded.

Chairperson Davidetta Browne Lansanah assured all political leaders, Liberians, and stakeholders that NEC remains committed to conducting the 10 October elections in a free, fair, and credible manner as it has been a hallmark of the institution.

NEC, she said considered the forum as a wonderful opportunity for positive engagement and called on all political leaders to play their role in ensuring that the electoral process progresses and continues peacefully.

She announced that the final list of candidates will be published on 5 August.

Concerning the preparations for the elections, Chairperson Browne Lansanah said NEC being cognizant of the huge infrastructural challenges, especially road connectivity has embarked on early procurement of materials for early deployment. NEC, she said has initiated conversations with some institutions to assist with the movement of sensitive and non-sensitive electoral materials to the counties.

She said that NEC is using a multitier approach for civic and voter education, including the use of CVE Cells, civil society, general outreach activities, electronic, print, and social media, as well as visual arts to educate and mobilize Liberians to participate in the electoral process from an informed position.

The Chairperson reiterated that while the commission had transitioned to biometric voter registration, voting in the October 10 elections will be done manually as has been done in the past.

President George Weah said the Farmington Declaration remains a solemn pledge to uphold the values of democracy, peace, and inclusiveness.

President Weah reminded the aspirants that together through the document they made a promise to the people of Liberia to create an environment that is free from violence and conducive to free and fair elections and must therefore lead by example and ensure that the electoral process is transparent and inclusive, thereby guaranteeing the unrestricted rights of every citizen to exercise their franchise peacefully.

"As we approach the October 10 Presidential and General Elections, let us remember that the success of these elections does not solely rest with the government but every single individual. It requires the fully committed participation of all citizens and the support of Liberia's friendly partners, he stated.

He assured that the government in collaboration with NEC will spare no efforts in ensuring that the October 10 election meets all national and international standards.

"We are determined to uphold the principles of democracy and provide a level playing field for all candidates and political parties, he said.

The Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, Cameroonian Ambassador His Excellency Beng'uela Augustine Gang encourages all stakeholders to keep the Farmington spirit and also bear in mind the need for peace considering that Liberia has celebrated 20 years of peace since the Accra Comprehensive Agreement and the end of the war.

He reiterated the assurances of the continuous support of the diplomatic corps to the electoral process. He also thanked the political leaders for reaffirming their commitment to a peaceful and secured election.

ECOWAS Ambassador Her Excellency Josephine Nkrumah commended NEC for its responsiveness and transparency as Liberia progresses to the electoral process.

"We have seen enhanced communications to the public and we have seen consensus building on the Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC). Of course, we have seen the challenges as well and we have noted that NEC has been responsive to suggestions and advice, and assistance from all partners, be it international or national," she observed.

NEC, Ambassador Nkrumah said has adopted strategies bearing in mind the challenges by working together to collectively ensure that free, fair, transparent, inclusive, peaceful, and credible elections are conducted.

She commended NEC and the presidential aspirants for the symbolic event. She said the presence of the aspirants is a clear testament and demonstration of peace for Liberia's forward march.

In separate remarks, the candidates reaffirmed their commitment to upholding the Farmington River Declaration. They also affixed their autographs on several infographics with inscriptions of messages promoting peaceful elections and non-violence against women. The candidates also signed the sample ballots for the 2023 elections.



International Labor Organization Trains 25 Liberians to Serve as Trainers in Cooperative Development in Rural Liberia

Photo: ILO

Gbarnga, Bong County – The International Labor Organization (ILO), as part of the United Nations Human Security Trust Funds Project, has begun a 10-day (10th to 20th August 2023) workshop for training of trainers (TOTs) on cooperative development and management in Gbarnga, Bong County.

The training which is being held at the Club Serengeti Hill Top Hotel in Bong County, is expected to empower trainers from the respective project communities of Zorzor and Yealla, Botota and Foequelleh, Bahn and Gbanquoi in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba Counties respectively and as well other social partners and key stakeholders on cooperative development and managerial roll-out training of youth and women-led agricultural cooperatives and farmers-based organizations.

About 25 people are participating in the training-of-trainers workshop. They include representatives of the Cooperative Development Agency, project beneficiaries, government counterparts at the national and local levels, social partners, and youth representatives.

The workshop focuses on various cooperative development modules including Principles and values of cooperatives, Establishing and sustaining cooperatives, Gender participation in Cooperatives, Governance and leadership of cooperatives, and Cooperative Marketing amongst others.

The 25 trainer candidates will cascade cooperative training to agricultural cooperatives, farmers' organizations, and youth/women groups, and will pay particular attention to the potential role of cooperative enterprises in addressing the human security challenges faced by the project communities.

The workshop is being conducted by a seasoned cooperative expert, Albert Mruma from Tanzania. Speaking on behalf of the ILO Country Director responsible for Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, Madam Vanessa L. Phala, the ILO Country Coordinator for Liberia, Salif Haji Massalay said the workshop is being conducted within the framework of the United Nations Human Security Trusts Funds Project.

Mr. Massalay said that this component of the project will empower and enhance economic empowerment and sustainability in the targeting communities of the project in the north-central region of Liberia.

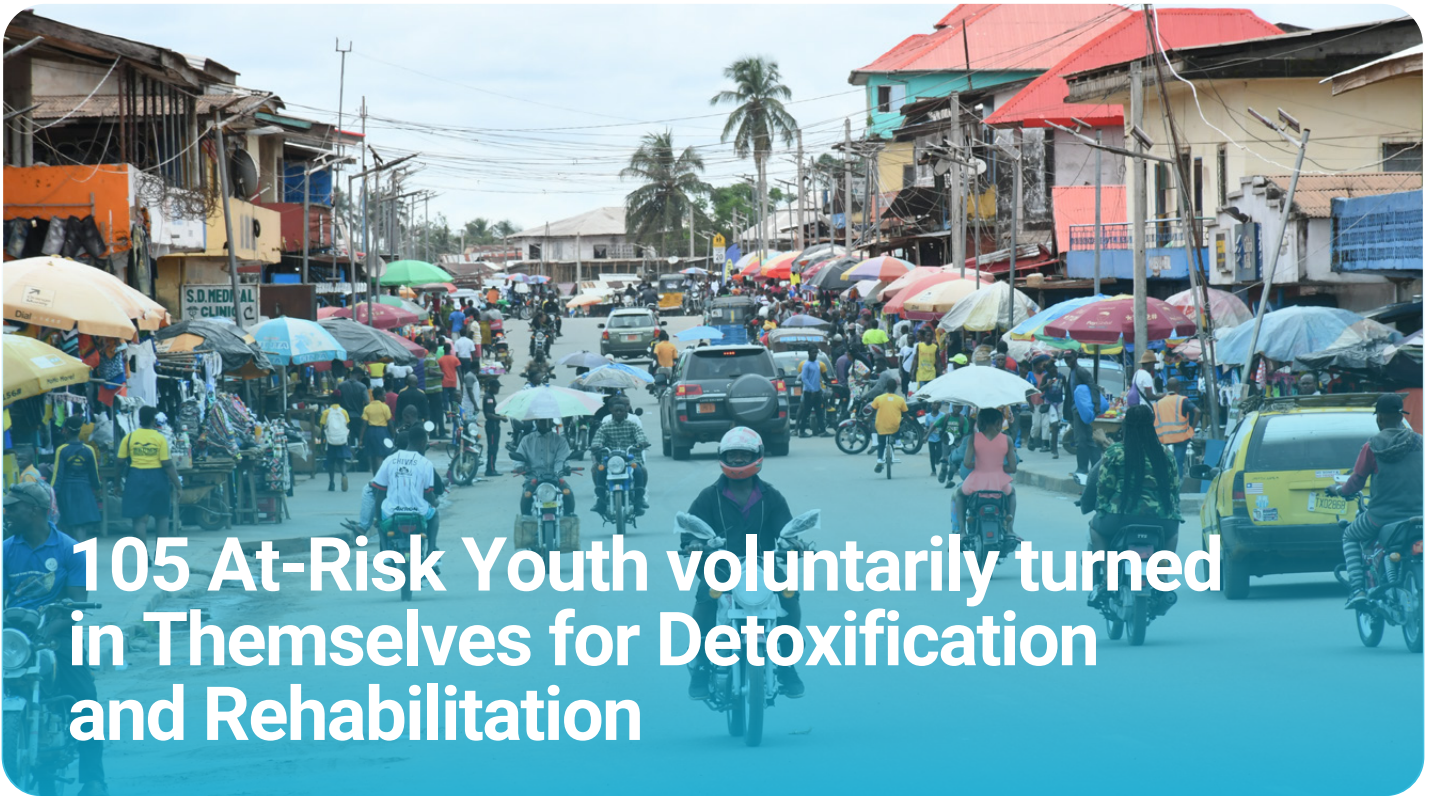
Also making remarks, the Senior National Economist at UNDP-Liberia, Stanley Kamara emphasized the importance of cooperation as a means of empowering vulnerable community members for sustainable development.

Mr. Kamara thanked the ILO for its tremendous efforts being made in the implementation of the Human Security Project. The Human Security Trust Fund project titled: Building Resilience of Youth, Women and Vulnerable Groups through Social Projection Floor in Liberia aims to address the complex multi-sectorial and inter-connected challenges of human insecurities particularly food, social, and economic issues for the most vulnerable and neglected populations of the North-Central region of Liberia at the community level.

The project promotes the concept of human security through implementing this initiative as a model of human security with "protection" and "empowerment" measures as the most appropriate approach. It will target 3,000 young women and men household heads including youth living with disabilities as direct beneficiaries (targeting %50 male and %50 female participants) and 10,000 indirect beneficiaries. It is being implemented by five UN agencies including FAO as the lead, ILO, UNDP, WFP, and UN Women.

The Participants of the training-of-trainers were selected predominantly from within the project communities in Zorzor and Yealla, Botota and Foequelleh, and Bahn and Gbanquoi in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba Counties respectively, as well as other social partners and key stakeholders who will also benefit from the intervention.

The establishment of cooperatives is one of the key components of the project in alleviating poverty, as the relevance of cooperative enterprises in prevention, mitigation, and post-conflict reconstruction has also been highlighted in various countries. Cooperative enterprises have a valuable role to play in terms of pooling know-how and resources, sharing risks and responsibilities, and ensuring a collective voice among those most likely to be severely affected by the impact of a crisis. This partly explains the relevance of the cooperative model in crisis response and recovery strategies and makes the role even more important in the Liberian context.



105 At-Risk Youth voluntarily turned in Themselves for Detoxification and Rehabilitation

The Government of Liberia (GoL), through the National Steering Committee for the At-Risk Youth program, has started the recruitment and subsequent rehabilitation process for the At-Risk-Youth, also known as "Zogos"

The voluntary recruitment process, which began on Monday August 21, 2023, has so far witnessed one hundred and five (105) At-Risk Youths being documented.

According to a release issued under the signature of Deputy Information Minister Jarlahwah A. Tonpo, who is also a Member of the Technical Working Group for the At-Risk Youth program, the "At-Risk-Youth" voluntarily came from the Pelhnum Building- on Center Street, and around the Invincible Park communities in Sinkor, Monrovia.

The release further stated that of the 105 At-Risk-Youth registered, 88 of them are males while 17 are females.

Of the 88 males, so far, 38 were taken to ES Grant Memorial Hospital in Duport Road to stay for the period of 2 weeks for Detoxification before transferring them for rehabilitation. The other 50 males were sent to Star Base on the Bushrod Island for Detoxification and Rehabilitation. They will remain there for the period of up to between three and six (6-3) months depending on their levels of recovery.

Similarly, the 17 Females At-Risk-Youth documented and sent to Mother Rescue Center for Detoxification and subsequent rehabilitation will also remain at the center for the period of three to six (6-3) months as well.

At the start of the recruitment, Minister D. Zeogar Wilson, who is the National Chairman for the Steering Committee, said the move is in fulfillment of the government commitment to rehabilitate At-Risk Youth from the streets.

Minister Wilson described the start of the At-Risk Youth program as a boost intended to Detoxify and reunite the young people in the society and make them more productive citizens.

He extended thanks and appreciation to President George Manneh Weah and the UN for their support towards the At-Risk Youth program.

It can be recalled that on June 2022, 30, the GoL in collaboration with One UN system in Liberia launched the At-Risk Youth program intended to address, tackle and take youthful Liberians who are addicted to drugs from the streets.



How the UN in Liberia is working with Government and Communities to address Food Insecurity

Caption: Farmers of "Say No to Hunger" Cooperative tend their crops
Photo: © UN Liberia

“The FAO, in its latest Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, noted that hunger is at an alarming rate in Liberia

This has affected a staggering number of citizens with approximately 21,500 people projected during the June to August 2023 in emergency food insecurity levels — and over 531,000 people facing acute food insecurity, associated with high food prices due to high international commodity prices and elevated transport costs. According to Liberia's Rapid Food Security, Livelihoods, Nutrition and Markets Assessment August 2022, (WFP) Liberia faces significant food insecurity, with more than two million people living below the poverty line, accounting for around %47 of the total population of Liberia and a substantial proportion of the population (about 424,000 people) experiencing severe food gaps or insecurity.

Over the last six months, FAO trained a total of 2,687 smallholder farmers and rural individuals in sustainable agricultural practices. Among them, 1,966 smallholders received support for the income-generation activities and benefited from agricultural inputs and equipment (including fingerings, improved rice and vegetable seeds, power tillers, and water pumps). The focus was on empowering women, youth and vulnerable rural populations, with women accounting for %71 of the beneficiaries.

The Home-Grown School Feeding programme, implemented by the World Food Programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, addresses food security and education needs, providing a holistic approach to alleviating poverty and hunger. Over the past 6 months, WFP reached over 42,000 schoolchildren across 180 schools with onsite meals from locally produced food commodities such as rice, palm oil, garri, and cow peas. In addition, 3000 vulnerable families of school children also receive monthly cash assistance through a take-home ration. Additionally, under the WFP resilience programme, about 4000 vulnerable smallholder farmers have received cash assistance with a transfer value of \$45 to support them in improving their food and nutritious status. These smallholder farmers are engaged in asset-creation activities such as the development/rehabilitation of low land for rice and vegetable production. They also receive marketable skill training to diversify their livelihood.



Young and seasoned female peace-builders in Liberia share experiences amid calls for peaceful elections

Photo Credit: UN Women Liberia

Young and seasoned female peace-builders in Liberia gathered at the Monrovia City Hall on Friday, 25 August 2023, for an inter-generational dialogue to mark 20 years of peace in Liberia.

The dialogue was held in observance of the 20th Anniversary of the Accra Peace Agreement, signed on 18 August 2003, to end the second civil war in Liberia and to usher in a new era of peace.

Seasoned panelists Vaiba Flomo, Cecilia Danuweli, Dr. Evelyn Kandakai and Baidu Saturday shared invaluable insights, reflections and experiences on building and sustaining peace in Liberia. Alongside them, young peace-builders, Hawa Dunor Varney, Nusone Perkins and Massa Dugulu, had the unique opportunity to engage and connect with the trailblazing women who were instrumental in securing peace two decades ago, fostering a meaningful exchange of experiences and insights.

Unity of purpose, resilience, communication, commitment and prayer are some of the key strategies that helped the women of Liberia to bring about peace. Other essential aspects spotlighted during the dialogue included the importance of youth engagement, documenting contributions and bolstering resilience.

One of the resounding messages that emerged from the discussions was to safeguard the hard-earned peace during the upcoming elections. Atty. Facia Harris and Vickjune Wutoh skillfully moderated the insightful deliberations.

Christine Umutoni, UN Liberia Resident Coordinator, saluted the strong, indomitable, resilient and ever-present women of Liberia who are the guardians of the hard-won peace.

As Liberia is heading for elections, Ms. Umutoni underscored the importance of holding peaceful elections. She appealed to all political party leaders and followers to commit to peaceful elections and uphold the principles of the Farmington declaration, including the commitment to fight violence against women.

Comfort Lamptey, UN Women Liberia Country Representative, applauded the women of Liberia for being trendsetters.

“Twenty years ago, Liberian women made history and won the admiration of women worldwide. They demonstrated that women, working together, in unity and determination, can accelerate a country’s march to peace,” said Ms. Lamptey.

Among other contributions, Liberian women paved the path to peace; ushered in Africa’s first female president, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and continue to inspire the world through the Nobel Prize-winning achievements of Madam Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee. The inter-generational dialogue therefore served as an earnest tribute to the pivotal contribution of Liberian women.

Former President of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as well as government ministers, officials, members of the diplomatic community, representatives from the United Nations, civil society organizations, women peace-builders in Liberia, and the media, among others graced the occasion.

The Women’s Mass Action for Peace, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Centre (EJS), the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UN Women, the Embassies of Ireland and Sweden joined hands to support this critical dialogue.



Caption: UN Resident Coordinator Christine Umutoni speaking at the event
Photo: © UN Women Liberia



Caption: UN Women Country Rep, Madame Comfort Lamptey,
Photo: © UN Women Liberia



UN supports Liberia National Police through training on Human Rights and Policing in Electoral Context

Photo Credit: UNDP Liberia

The Liberia National Police, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), has initiated a three-day security management training program for officers of various security agencies. The focus of this training is on Human Rights and Policing in the context of the upcoming elections.

The training will target Election Security Officers throughout the country, beginning with training for 30 pre-existing trainers who will be responsible to cascade the trainings in the 6 police regions covering the 15 counties of Liberia. Additionally, separate trainings will be held for commanders at the Country and Zone levels and the Formed Police Unit. The event was attended by the UN Resident Coordinator and the project was officially launched by the Deputy Inspector General.

The Inspector General of Police, who also chairs the elections security management committee, has issued a mandate to all joint security officers to maintain absolute neutrality and create a conducive environment to ensure impartial and equal security protection for all political parties, independent candidates, and their supporters before, during, and after the elections.

Deputy Police Commander for Operations, Melvin Sackor, speaking on behalf of the Police IG, assured the public that the security forces will respond robustly to election-related situations. He emphasized that any individuals or groups found violating the rights of others during the electoral processes will be held accountable according to the law.

Sackor stressed the importance of respecting people's rights during elections to prevent violence and maintain control over the situation. He highlighted that the security forces' training is not for personal benefit but to serve the people more effectively.

The Ambassador of Ireland, Gerald Considine, praised the vital role of the security forces, particularly the Liberia National Police, during the election, while commending the timely initiative to train security officers on election security management.

The Resident Coordinator of the United Nations programs, Christine N. Umutoni, delivered the keynote address during the launching ceremony at the Police Academy in Monrovia on July 31. She emphasized the crucial role of security forces in safeguarding human rights and maintaining peace during elections.

Umutoni emphasized that security agencies are fundamental to ensuring a peaceful electoral environment, which is essential for Liberia's continued stability. To support this goal, the OHCHR, UNDP, and partners are providing election management training to the Election Security Officers and other joint security officers. The training aims to enhance their capacity to prevent, manage, and respond to potential security threats during the elections.

The initiative supported by the United Nations Peace Building Project, with funding from Sweden, the European Union, and Irish Aid. It is being implemented under the Peace Building Fund titled: "Promoting a peaceful electoral environment and community in Liberia." This project aims to support peace by addressing conflict prevention, widespread insecurity, human rights violations, and electoral violence before, during, and after the 2023 general elections in Liberia.



THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL FOR UNOWAS, MR LEONARDO SIMÃO CONCLUDES A THREE-DAY VISIT TO LIBERIA, CALLS FOR INCLUSIVE, PEACEFUL AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Leonardo Santos Simão, concluded today a three-day visit to Liberia. This visit was part of his regional familiarization tour, following his appointment as Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel.

The Special Representative was received in audience by H.E. Georges Weah, President of Liberia, and had meetings with Mr. Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Frank Musah Dean, Minister of Justice, and members of the National Elections Commission. He also held discussions with Youth and Women organizations, members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the diplomatic corps, and the United Nations country team.

To all his interlocutors, Mr. Simão reiterated the commitment of UNOWAS and the United Nations Country team to strengthen their partnership with Liberia, and to continue working with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and other members of the international community, to support Liberia's path towards lasting democracy, peace, and prosperity.

During his visit, the Special Representative also participated in the stakeholder forum that took place on 15 August in preparation of the upcoming presidential elections to be held in October 2023. He commended all stakeholders, and called on the presidential candidates to uphold their commitment for the implementation of the Farmington River Declaration which paves the way for an inclusive, peaceful, and democratic process. He stressed the responsibility of all stakeholders to educate their supporters to the rules of good conduct demonstrating their responsible leadership. The Special Representative encouraged all actors to harness the positive force of Liberian women and called on Liberian youth to continue playing a positive role as agents of peace.



Towards the future: What next for Liberia after 20 years of peace? A UN Resident Coordinator's Blog

Photo Credit : UN Liberia

2023 marks twenty years of enduring peace in Liberia.

After the civil war, which claimed the lives of over 200,000 people, a comprehensive peace agreement was signed in August 2003 in Accra, Ghana. Since then, Liberia has sustained a period of uninterrupted stability; transforming from one of the most volatile to one of the most peaceful nations in West Africa.

Over the years, this country, where I am proud to serve as UN Resident Coordinator, has made significant strides in its socio-economic development journey. Liberians have demonstrated tremendous resilience, battling the devastating impacts of Ebola and COVID-19, contending with growing inflation, mobilizing grassroots leadership and making slow but sure dents in tackling infant mortality.

Yet to reap the full economic and social benefits of this hard-fought peace a lot more needs to be done.

National poverty levels remain high. Gender and income inequalities are still pronounced, and it is estimated that 57 per cent of school-aged children remain out of school. On top of this, rising costs of commodities following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have added to Liberia's economic challenges.

Now more than ever, a long-term vision and coordinated plan to forge lasting, sustainable development is needed.

Here are some examples of how we, as the UN country team are supporting the government together with our partners.

Data driven decision making

In the digital age, data is an indispensable tool for decision-making and is the baseline for effective development planning. At the end of 2022, our UN country team supported the Government to conduct the first national census in 14 years. This included vital data on the most disadvantaged communities and the factors such as a lack of access to quality healthcare and education, which are leaving them behind.

As the co-chair of the National Steering Committee on National Population and Housing Census, the UN facilitated the entire census exercise from beginning to the end. Along with the ECOWAS Ambassador, in my capacity as the RC, we helped bring together political parties and national statistic institutions to build consensus on the importance of the census for national development planning.

Led by UNFPA, our UN country team provided the needed technical expertise in this endeavour. Our Data Management Officer, in particular, played a vital role in facilitating national efforts in the collection, analysis, and utilization of the census data.

The robust data systems which we helped establish are already enabling policymakers and development partners make informed choices, monitor progress, and adapt interventions in real-time. This is also forming the basis of Liberia's new national development plan and an upcoming study on the 'drivers of inclusive and sustainable development' led by UNDP and supported by other UN agencies as well as our development partners. The study will provide a common blueprint for Liberia to cross the finish line towards 2030 agenda.



Caption: Political participation of young people in Liberia is crucial. RC Christine Umutoni (left) visits a voters' registration center with Giovannie Biha, Deputy Special Representative of the SG, UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (second left).
Photo: © UN Liberia

Down-stream, community-led, youth-centered development From tackling poverty, addressing youth unemployment, and strengthening rural agriculture, effective development policy can't be outsourced – it must come from the bottom up. This is why our interventions are designed and implemented in a way to encourage local ownership and empower communities as agents of their own change.

As the census indicates, youth make up 79 per cent of the population. Two of our initiatives- the 'Youth Rising' project and "Youth at Risk" programme are helping tackle youth unemployment and vulnerability,

Towards the future: What next for Liberia after 20 years of peace? A UN Resident Coordinator's Blog

and empowering the next generation with skills, vocational training and practical jobs in sectors such as agriculture, construction, timber and mining. Such training is helping stimulate local rural economies, improve social cohesion, and counter the huge migration of young people to the city, where work is often difficult to find.

Realizing this demographic dividend is crucial for Liberia's development journey, which is why our UN team is committed to supporting the Government broaden its investments in youth empowerment, expand opportunities for decent work, and revisit national education plans from last year's Transforming Education Summit.

Partnering to end violence against women

Gender inequity and violence against women continues to be widespread in many parts of the country. In 2020, it was estimated that %49 of ever-partnered women aged 49-15 years experience intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

In fact, this type of data collected by UN-Women has helped paint a vivid picture of just how serious the problem is and helped bring this to the attention of policy makers at the national level.

In February 2022, through the support of a dedicated UN programme, ground-breaking progress was made with the signing of a three-year moratorium suspending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), between the Government of Liberia and traditional practitioners. Key to this success was the acceptance and buy in from traditional leaders, achieved in part

through our targeted advocacy efforts to these leaders and the wider community.

Beyond legislative progress, the UN's partnership with the European Union and the Liberian government through the Spotlight Initiative has also resulted in the establishment of dedicated learning centers, which offered traditional FGM practitioners and young women an opportunity to learn new livelihood skills, contributing to the broader goal of eradicating FGM in Liberia.

Towards the next chapter

The people and communities I have met in my first five months as Resident Coordinator reflect Liberia's immense potential for the future and the significant strides it has made towards sustainable development.

What comes next for Liberia will depend on continued efforts to build the economy through domestic resources and harness the power and voices of young people. As the UN, we remain steadfast in our support and investment in the country's 'down-stream', data-driven and inclusive development journey in the coming years.



Caption: Traditional FGM practitioners from the town of Sonkay learn alternative livelihood practices following FGM Ban
Photo: © UN Liberia



UN in Liberia host beneficiaries of Jewel Starfish Foundation

Photo Credit: UN Women Liberia

UN Resident Coordinator Christine Umutoni and the UNCT were honored to welcome beneficiaries of Jewel Star Fish Foundation to UN Liberia.

Led by Christine Umutoni, UN Liberia Resident Coordinator, this was an extraordinary meeting of empowerment, resilience, determination and a shared vision of hope.

Formerly from West Point, a disadvantaged area in Monrovia, the youth were formerly considered at risk youth. Now they are shining students ready to forge a better life and be an example to others. Beneficiaries gave moving stories of inspiration and were urged to continue their strive for a better future.

The Resident Coordinator and UNCT urged the young women to consider themselves as victors and not victims in society. Stating that the "sky is no longer the limit", Ms Umutoni encouraged them to "go forth and shine the light for others".

RC Umutoni noted that, "it was a great pleasure to welcome young girls from the Foundation to the One UN House and presided to give them a tour of the agencies along with the UNCT.



Breakfast with the UN - UNCT and media managers discuss One UN's work in Liberia

Caption: Group photo of media managers along with UNCT and RC
Photo: © UN Liberia

The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Liberia, Ms. Christine N. Umutoni, hosted a productive breakfast meeting with distinguished media editors, facilitated by the UN communications group. The purpose of the meeting was to shed light on the UN's work in the country, its commitment to supporting Liberia's journey towards sustainable peace and socio-economic development towards Liberia's transformation. The discussion centered around a range of key topics, highlighting the UN's significant role since the UN reform. The meeting further clarified that since the departure of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2018, the country was declared peaceful and among nations that are on the road to development hence the UN presence was reconfigured into the UNCT that focuses on development.

The UN family in Liberia (UNCT) is made up of 21 UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes, actively dedicated to supporting the country's national plan for progress and prosperity. The UN's structure is now designed to support the Liberian government's efforts effectively and efficiently to sustain the peace and ensure progress towards economic development. The One United Nations is led by the UN Resident Coordinator and is made up of an empowered unified United Nations Country team (UNCT).

Discussions also covered the UN Reform in Liberia, which has aimed to streamline and enhance coordination among UN entities in the country, promoting synergies and maximizing impact. Working as one coherent unit, the UN system continues to align its activities with Liberia's national priorities, with special attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Africa Agenda 2063.

As Liberia prepares for the upcoming elections in 2023, the UN Resident Coordinator has applauded the country for leading and fully owning the elections process. She informed that the UN provides technical electoral support to national authorities, civil society, and other stakeholders.

The meeting further informed that the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) forms a consolidated Cooperation Framework between the Government of Liberia and the UN. It is linked to the national development plan -the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD). Ms. Christine N. Umutoni emphasized that the UN Cooperation Framework is aligned with the PAPD, ensuring a harmonized approach towards achieving common objectives. The UN work always comes to support national priorities, hence all the outcomes of the UNSDCF are aligned to PAPD pillars.

Throughout the discussion, the UN's ongoing efforts in various critical areas of work in Liberia were highlighted. These included support to the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery plans, the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative to combat violence against women and girls, empowering youth at risk, supporting electoral process, ensuring community based work in all sectors including health initiatives like immunization coverage, and enhancing community health worker programs, promoting school feeding programs, initiatives towards food security and livelihoods, youth and women empowerment, support to smart village initiative, among others .

Furthermore, Ms. Christine N. Umutoni informed the meeting that the UN Country Team will establish a UN Hub in the South-east region in the effort to work close to communities. This will reinforce accelerated community development program (ACDP) promoting a wholistic approach to community development and the Smart Villages initiative, as well as other community -based interventions which demonstrates the UN's commitment to inclusivity and sustainable development across all regions of Liberia.

The breakfast meeting concluded with an optimistic outlook for Liberia's future, underscoring the UN's continued partnership with the country's transformation as it strives for peace, prosperity, and sustainable development. The UN and partners will continue to support Liberia as the country concludes the current national development plan towards designing a new one. The drivers of development study will be a key tool to ensure Liberia focuses on those areas that accelerate development. The role of national institutions, the private sector, civil society organization as well as communities was emphasized, noting that country needs to generate domestic resources to drive development because aid is not enough.

The media and information is a key component of national development and engagement with the media to promote responsible citizenship for sustainable development.



Facilitators of Peace Huts in Bong and Grand Bassa Benefit from Capacity Strengthening

Photo: © UN Women Liberia

-Monrovia-

The Orange Digital Center (ODC) in Monrovia, UN Women Liberia, and Orange Foundation, in partnership with National Peace Hut Women of Liberia (NaPHWoL), recently conducted a Training of Trainers for five peace huts community-based facilitators and two days of capacity building for three Chairs from the NaPHWoL in digital and financial literacy, digitized Savings and Loan Association (SLA) model/methodology and Orange Mobile Money. The objective of the training was to strengthen the capacity of the Facilitators by providing knowledge and skills to support the implementation of digital literacy classes for rural women in the two Women Digital Centers (WDCs) in Bong and Nimba Counties.

According to the Women's Economic Empowerment Program Manager, Ramon G. Garway, upon completion of the training, the Facilitators are expected to commence the Cycle Three digital literacy classes for 100 (50 per county) new peace hut women and young girls in Totota, Bong, and Tarr Town, Grand Bassa Counties. He mentioned that over the past two years, UN Women Liberia and Orange Foundation have been working to ensure that the two existing WDCs in Bong and Grand Bassa Counties continue to provide peace hut women with access to digital literacy classes and tools. The intervention will address the gender digital divide and promote digital literacy among peace hut women, which is crucial to ensuring equal participation, empowerment, and access to opportunities in the increasingly digital world.

During the training, Aisha Kamara Kolubah, National Project Officer at UN Women, did a presentation on the Buy from Women (BfW) Platform. According to Ms. Kolubah, the BfW Platform is a cloud-based enterprise and e-commerce platform that links women farmers and entrepreneurs to market, information, and finance. It addresses the structural barriers faced by women smallholder farmers, equipped entrepreneurs, and small business owners.

Lischen Dwuye Kamara, Orange Money Distribution Manager, led the presentation on a step-by-step guide on the operation of Orange Money. These sessions provided knowledge for the Facilitators who will serve as Orange Money Agents to provide extension and advisory on services for BfW and Orange Money activities in the targeted communities.

Also, at the training, Zaza Mulba, the Executive Director of the Orange Digital Center, provided detailed information on the available services at the ODC. The Center provides access to digital technology for young people with or without qualifications. It gives them access to the latest technological skills to strengthen their employability and prepare them for jobs. All of the programs are provided free of charge and open to everyone. They ranged from digital trainings for young people, 90% of which are practical guidance for project bearers, and start-up acceleration.



Photo: © UN Women Liberia

The United Nations Communication Group (UNCG) hosted a two-day training for more than thirty young journalists in Monrovia.

The training which happened on September 20th and 21st, focused on how journalists can act to rescue the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in Liberia.

Speaking at the training the Chair of the UNCG Mr. Amadou Alassane Cisse cautioned the journalists to maintain their independence and be a more reliable Voice while disseminating information to the public on the SDGs, thereby 'Leaving No One Behind'.

According to the Chair of the UN Communication Group, the partnership with the media is a result of trust and commitment to what they do.

He also stressed the need for journalists to be more balanced in their reportorial duties.

"Keep your voice, keep your commitment, and realize we are not trying to have UN journalists, we are not also asking you to be the United Nations voice but continued to support the efforts to leave no one behind", Mr. Cisse added.

The UNCG also stressed the need for journalists in Liberia to get involved in reporting and engaging the public and decision makers on the 17 Goals.

They highlighted the importance of informing all Liberians about the linkages between the Sustainable Development Goals and national development. The UNCG journalists are crucial in that they have direct engagement and interaction with the larger society.

Reporter Carson Mehn, one of the beneficiaries, applauded the United Nations Communication Group for the training describing it as " very impactful".

"The training reminded us of our ethics as journalists and broadened our understanding of the SDGs, Disabilities Inclusive Communications, Elections Reporting, Principles of Reporting on Children's Rights, Managing Social Media During Elections, among others" " he noted.

The training brought together journalists between the ages of 18 to 35 from various media entities across Montserrado County.



Photo: © UN Liberia



Photo: © UN Liberia



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LIBERIA**

This newsletter is the result of the collaborative efforts of the United Nations Communication Group in Liberia, which comprises representatives from various UN agencies, funds and programmes. We would like to express our gratitude to all the contributors who shared their stories, insights and perspectives on the issues affecting Liberia and its people. We also thank our readers for their continued interest and support. We hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and welcome your feedback and suggestions.

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