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## **Empowering Forest Communities: How FAO's CBFM Project is Changing Lives in Liberia**

In the heart of Liberia's lush green forests, a quiet revolution is unfolding. Communities that once had little say over the fate of their forests are now taking charge, thanks to a transformative initiative led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its partners. The Community-Based Forestry and Protected Area Management (CBFM) project is not just about conservation—it is about empowering people, strengthening livelihoods, and preserving a way of life.

For decades, the forests of River Gee and Sinoe counties have been home to many, providing food, medicine, and shelter. However, the challenge of sustainable management has always been present. With funding from the Government of Sweden, FAO, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), is working to change this narrative. By helping communities establish governance structures and adopt sustainable practices, the project is giving residents a renewed sense of ownership and pride.

Opayos Blawah, a resident of Kiteapo Forest Community in River Gee County, vividly remembers the struggles his community faced before the project began. Disputes over land use, lack of clear leadership, and a growing threat to their natural resources had left many feeling hopeless.

"Before FAO and SDI came in, we were lost. We had no way to manage our forest properly, and there was always confusion among us," Blawah shares. "Now, we have a structured governing body, and we make the decisions about our land. This is a dream come true for us."





*1 - Residents of Kiteapo Community in Riverge County posed for a group photo with FAO visiting team*

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**“We need to find a way to live in harmony with the forest.”**

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The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), one of the project’s implementing partners, played a crucial role in guiding the community through a democratic election process to set up a forest management body. With eight out of the nine steps required for legal governance now completed, Blawah and his fellow community members are on the brink of achieving full autonomy over their community forest.

For Gloria Pah, an elected member of the Community Assembly for Forest Governance, the CBFM project has been nothing short of an eye-opener.

“I used to see the forest as just trees and bushes,” she admits. “But through the trainings and workshops, I’ve learned that our forest holds incredible value—not just for us but for the world. It provides clean air, medicine, and even opportunities for sustainable income.”

Pah advocates for a balanced approach—setting aside portions of the forest for conservation while allocating other areas for sustainable use. “We need to find a way to live in harmony with the forest. We don’t want to destroy it, but we also need to survive,” she explains.

In Sua, a forest community in Sinoe County, the enthusiasm for the project is high among community members. Residents like Alvin W. Slah and Everlyn Winker see the initiative as a crucial step toward a sustainable future. However, challenges remain, particularly in uniting



neighboring communities such as Nyanwlicken and Johnsonville under a single forest governance body.

“We are eager to complete all the required steps,” says Slah. “But we need more support in bringing other communities on board. Some are hesitant, but we are hopeful that FAO and its partners will help us bridge these gaps.”

Winker, though grateful for the project, is concerned about the delays caused by ongoing disputes. “We need FAO to step in and help fast-track this process. The longer we wait, the harder it becomes to unite everyone,” she says.

## Honey Production Brings Livelihood to Women in Twah River, Nimba County



One of ABEL’s member sits behind her table to sell the value-added honey to buyers in Nimba County

The sweetness of honey extends beyond its flavor; it also signifies an increase in income for beekeepers each year. “Kuku Tarkwiah (also known as the Queen Bee),” the chairperson of the Twah River Beekeepers Association, emphasizes this benefit.

With support from Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Forest and Farm Facility, the Association of Beekeepers Liberia (ABEL), which serves as an apex body for beekeepers in Liberia, is supporting the TWAH River Beekeeper Association (TRIBA) in Nimba County. Their goal is to add value to honey products and enhance marketability within Liberia.

ABEL has provided essential equipment and training in beekeeping techniques tailored to the local environment. Crucially, they have educated beekeepers on becoming savvy businesspeople. This includes producing, labeling, and branding their products to maximize value. Collaborating with other beekeepers enables them to access new markets. The branding of honey is a novel and captivating trend in the Liberian market. Previously, honey was often sold in bowls or recycled mineral water bottles. However, with FAO's support for beekeepers in Liberia, farmers have begun adding value to honey production through proper bottling, branding, and labeling. Their goal is to add value to honey products and enhance marketability within Liberia. This new business model has increased the income of beekeeping households, allowing them to invest in more hives, which will yield progressively higher income. Beekeepers like those in TRIBA are now processing up to 225 gallons of honey each season, selling it for around \$25 USD, or 4,725 Liberian dollars based on the current exchange rate. The organization, which has a strong female presence, has improved the livelihood of female household beekeepers in the region and enhanced the nutritional value for their family members. Honey has gradually become a symbol of prosperity among the people of the TWAH River clan. The growing membership of TRIBA, which has expanded from 16 members at its inception to 300 members currently, reflects the increasing interest in beekeeping. Furthermore, this activity is elevating women's status in their communities as they emerge as successful businesspeople. As a result, broader opportunities are now available for younger generations, as their parents can afford to invest in their education. The National Agriculture Fair held from December 5-7, 2024, highlighted the importance of honey in nutritional diets and underscored the need for increased beekeeping efforts across the country. Bees play a vital role in conserving the TWAH river communities by helping to restore natural vegetation in degraded areas. Beekeepers are dedicated to maintaining the surrounding habitat to ensure the health of bee populations, which involves preserving forests where many preferred nectar-producing plants thrive.

## **Government of Liberia, IOM, and ECOWAS Join Forces to Assist Victims of Human Trafficking**





The Government of Liberia, through its Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Secretariat, is providing protection assistance to 44 female victims of human trafficking—including four children currently housed in a safe home and 40 adult women—with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and funding from the ECOWAS Commission’s Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs (DHSA). This joint initiative provides a comprehensive package of services tailored to the needs of each victim. Support includes access to medical care, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), essential food and non-food items, vocational skills training, and assistance to establish microbusinesses for sustainable reintegration. The initiative forms part of a broader ECOWAS regional programme aimed at strengthening the protection and rehabilitation capacities of Member States. Under this initiative, the ECOWAS DHSA allocated USD 35,000 to Liberia—channeled through IOM—to enhance national efforts to support and empower victims of trafficking, both internal and external, in Liberia. Building on previous collaboration with IOM—including the refurbishment of shelters, training of frontline service providers, and reintegration of trafficking survivors—the Government of Liberia continues to lead in tackling trafficking in persons and expanding victim-centered services. IOM also continues to support the Government by facilitating travel documentation, voluntary return, and reintegration assistance for Liberian migrants stranded abroad, including victims of trafficking in Africa, Europe, and beyond. This partnership reflects a shared commitment to upholding human dignity and ensuring protection, recovery, and reintegration opportunities for survivors of trafficking across Liberia and the wider ECOWAS region.



## GOLA-REAP Project Launched to Strengthen Cross-Border Peace and Resilience



On 27 February 2025, the Governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone, in partnership with the United Nations, officially launched the GOLA-REAP (Resilience, Empowerment, Access, and Peacebuilding) project at Bo Waterside, Grand Cape Mount County, Liberia. Funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) with a contribution of USD 4 million, the initiative aims to strengthen cross-border collaboration, enhance social cohesion, and promote sustainable livelihoods in the Gola Forest landscape—a shared ecological and cultural heritage. Building on the momentum of the launch, the first GOLA-REAP Project joint Steering Committee (PSC) meeting was held on 3 April 2025 in Bo, Sierra Leone. The meeting convened representatives from national and local authorities, UN partners, and implementing agencies to validate the joint workplan, and define key next steps. Both events were attended by senior government officials, including the Ministers of Internal Affairs from Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the United Nations Resident Coordinators for both countries. The GOLA-REAP project is jointly implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP), in partnership with government ministries, state institutions, local civil society organizations (CSOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs), with a strong focus on community empowerment, inclusive local governance, and sustainable natural resource management. This initiative builds on earlier cross-border peacebuilding efforts and reflects the shared commitment of both governments and the United Nations to foster long-term peace, resilience, and development in the Mano River Union region.



## Empowering Farmers and Improving Access to Clean Water- Govt-UNDP Impact Rural Communities

Across Liberia, the positive impact of projects supported and managed by UNDP in partnership with the government and other donors on local communities is evident. Through strategic interventions focused on agriculture, water, and sanitation, some of these projects are transforming the lives of rural communities, including those in Bong, Nimba, and Lofa counties.

Kpatolee Agriculture Cooperative in Flehla, Bong County shares an interesting testimony of the success of the government-funded Accelerated Community Development Programme (ACDP) through its Chairperson Joseph Fahn. Fahn narrated a remarkable journey so far since the intervention of the ACDP managed by UNDP in the area, describing the interventions as significant and improving productivity through such a collaboration.

Fahn first recounted the role of ACDP/UNDP in the community, and the cooperative in general. "Within a short time, we secured \$20,000 from the ACDP and the UNDP program, to purchase land to construct a multipurpose office that includes our storage facility/warehouse. This was just the beginning of our journey towards growth, development, and sustainability," he said.

Fahn also mentioned the leadership and skills training provided under the project that has helped the cooperative members to understand how to manage a successful and sustainable institution. "This capacity-building support has been critical to empowering smallholder farmers, particularly in enhancing the cooperative management skills and agriculture practices. Moreover, farming equipment, including tractors, power tillers, and other tools provided by the project to improve our farming practices and mode of operation has also made a significant difference, bringing us to a better place now than before," Joseph explained.



He said the cooperative is working on 30-acre farmland to be harvested by April 1st this year. “The Cooperative members put a lot into this farm, planting varieties of crops. Women, youths, the young, and old are fully involved. You see older women carrying bricks, fetching water, and working tirelessly, you won’t believe they are volunteers. We are passionate about what we do and the support from the government and its partners including UNDP makes us thrive,” Fahn continued.

The Kpatolee Agriculture Cooperative Chairperson said the cooperative plans to build a guest house to accommodate visitors during important events and ceremonies. “This will become a center for progress. After some years, this will become a hub for progress and together we can make it happen,” he optimistically stressed.

Despite the gains, challenges remain unavoidable, as Fahn stressed the importance of conducting a comprehensive assessment to determine additional support needed.

### **Water and Sanitation: A Game Changer for Rural Communities**

In Donfah, another community in Bong County, Esther Giddings, chairperson of the Bong Kuka’tonon Farmers’ Multipurpose Cooperative Society expressed her gratitude for the ACDP/UNDP intervention, particularly the access to clean and safe drinking water. “We fetched water from the creek where we walked a distance from the town, so, when we were asked by the project what we needed, we chose a water facility, and it was constructed and turned over to us in late December 2024. Since then, we have stopped drinking from the creek which was unsafe for us,” said Esther.

She explained that surrounding community members pay a fee for use of their water facility and women use the kiosks for small businesses. “Twelve women manage and operate the four kiosks as small businesses using a shift system. The fees collected from other villagers using the water facility and the amount put aside from the small business to maintain the facilities are strategies for sustainability. These women serve as security for the kiosks and manage the small businesses there. Money generated is given to the treasurer,” she narrated.





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**"Access to water and farming equipment has helped improve our lives and farming methods."**

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Ms. Giddings also mentioned that the project supports farmers, especially women. This cooperative has about 86 members with 3.2 plus hectares of farmland. Before the project supported us in becoming a recognized and legal cooperative, we were only involved in farm work to sustain the family due to a lack of support. With the intervention from ACDP/UNDP, especially with the supply of farming equipment, farmers are beginning to grasp the idea of growing more food to eat and sell," Esther emphasized.

She said the supply of tools, encourages them to move gradually towards mechanized farming methods. "We are no longer using our hands to cut down trees now that we have power saws on our farms. Access to water and farming equipment has helped improve our lives and farming methods. We harvested almost 300 bags of seed rice, and now supplying other farmers so we can have more. The challenge now is to train our members to use this machinery. As the Chairperson of the Donfah Community Cooperative, I would like to thank the ACDP and our partner UNDP for what they continue to do for us," Giddings noted.

She said the cooperative dreams of building a marketplace and finding other ways of empowering women. "I have a big dream. As you can see when one of the women is on shift to manage the kiosk, she sells her goods to save money and establish a bigger business". Giddings concluded.

## UNDP's Interventions

UNDP's Interim Manager of the ACDP, Boye Johnson says the project launched in 2022, targets approximately 34 to 37 communities across Liberia, identified as highly impoverished. "These communities were selected to benefit from interventions under the project utilizing US\$3 million received from the government as part of a commitment of US\$100 million to address the pressing needs of rural communities," Johnson disclosed.



During a tour of a few of the project sites in Bong, Nimba, and Lofa Counties by UNDP's Resident Representative Aliou Dia, Johnson said with this funding, they have been assisting communities in forming cooperatives, with 14 established and fully functional across six counties including Bomi, Gbarpolu, Bong, River Cess, Nimba, and Lofa.

In addition to agricultural support, the UNDP has made interventions in the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector by supporting the construction of solar-powered boreholes and water infrastructure in five communities as seen in Donfah, Bong County.

These boreholes, equipped with water towers and chlorination units, provide safe drinking water in rural communities. The beneficiary communities include Madina, Totoquelleh, and Bopolu in Gbarpolu; Donfah in Bong County, and Yarpah Town in River Cess.

He also disclosed that the project plans to expand water facilities to three additional communities this year. Beyond water access, the program has also contributed immensely to Liberia's health sector.

In 2024, the Ministry of Health received seven ambulances for health centers in Bomi, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Nimba, River Cess, and River Gee to improve the country's healthcare services and emergency response time.

The ACDP's support of Liberia's agriculture sector is also making a huge impact in rural communities, especially smallholder farmers, women cooperatives, youth groups, and

marginalized communities, and providing mechanized equipment, including tractors and power tillers, to farming communities.

“Farmers are expanding their farming activities, with some cultivating as much as 164 acres of land in a single season, primarily producing rice. This progress aligns with the government’s goal of achieving food self-sufficiency, and UNDP sees this as a positive development for Liberia,” Boye noted.

In rural communities, access to clean water was previously a major challenge. Many women and children had to travel long distances to fetch water, exposing them to risks, including Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). Water facilities installed under the ACDP within target communities have alleviated some of these risks and now provide a reliable source of safe drinking water for the people.

### Moving Forward

Looking ahead, the Interim Manager of the UNDP/ ACDP says the focus is expanding its interventions to new communities. “UNDP is working closely with its Resident Representative, to assess progress, consolidate achievements, identify challenges, and implement solutions to address those challenges.

Boye Johnson said mobilizing sufficient funding remains crucial to expanding interventions in hard-to-reach communities. “Our partnerships have been positive with local authorities and community leadership. UNDP maintains a strong working relationship with the Government of Liberia and remains hopeful that these partnerships will continue to grow, allowing them to expand, impact and reach more communities,” Johnson concluded.



## Dokodan Cooperative Plans to Upscale to Boost Yields in Nimba



In Gbedin, Nimba county, Jefferson Mealor, co-chairperson of the Dokodan Farmers' Cooperative with a smile, boasted that the support received from the Accelerated Community Development Programme (ACDP) has transformed the cooperative.

The Cooperative received farm equipment and its implements, post-harvest processing machines, improved rice seeds, fertilizer, basic farming tools to increase productivity, and capacity-building training at different levels of governance, business development, and the handling and management of agrochemicals.

"For instance, the cooperative received new machines and even improvements to our office space. We can properly maintain our machines following training opportunities provided by UNDP. For this, we are grateful," Mealor noted.

In its first phase of rice production, the Dokodan Cooperative targeted over 400 acres with 309 acres already cultivated. He mentioned that they need additional equipment to reach their target.



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**“You can sustain yourself, support your family, and even send your children to school from farming. ”**

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“The cooperative aims to cover about 410 acres but needs additional equipment. Right now, we can only manage 309 acres. But if we receive additional support, especially from UNDP, we could expand,” he added. The expansion, he says, will cover an additional 101 acres of undeveloped land they have acquired.

“In the past, farming was difficult, and our yields were very low. Some farmers harvested only a small amount per acre. Now, we produce better yields, processing has improved and produce stored in the warehouse has doubled with more farmers bringing their crops in for preservation. UNDP/ACDP has also elevated the capacity of farmer cooperatives by hiring trainers to educate farmers on better farming techniques,” Jefferson narrated.

The supply of water is another challenge the cooperative faces. “If we had a better irrigation system, we could plant and harvest several times a year instead of just once. This would significantly increase our production and income. For example, if someone produced 50 bags of rice per acre, with improved water access, they could harvest three times a year—bringing in up to 160 bags. The government could also help by setting fair prices for farmers, ensuring sustainability,” he added.

The Dokodan farmer cooperative is working with 2,050 farmers hoping to recruit additional members to cover the land space secured for agricultural purposes. Mealor is optimistic that the agriculture sector will improve with support from the government and its partners.

“We are witnessing steady progress, with colleges and universities also improving their agriculture curriculum,” intimated the cooperative’s co-chairperson.

He encouraged other communities not to depend on the government for everything but to engage in agriculture because it provides self-employment. “You can sustain yourself, support your family, and even send your children to school from farming,” said Mealor.

The Gbedin community in Nimba County, in the northern part of Liberia, has an estimated population of three thousand people.

The Gbedin rice station established in the 1980s was not demolished but looted during the war, taking away its processing equipment. However, the cooperative uses it as a warehouse or storage facility for its harvest, tools, and machinery and looks forward to reestablishing it as a fully operational post-harvest processing facility.

The Government of Liberia in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) brought hope to farmers, with the launch of the Accelerated Community Development Programme (ACDP) in 2022.

The ACDP aims to strengthen human capital and resilience to shocks and pandemics, facilitate and contribute to the national development plan, and, by extension, contribute to efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

## OHCHR holds two-day training on transitional justice for Civil Society



"On 18 and 19 March 2025, OHCHR organized a two-day training on transitional justice (TJ) and human rights-based, gender, and child-responsive approaches for civil society organizations (CSOs) as part of its TJ project.



Held in Monrovia, the training was attended by 33 participants, including 14 women (42%), from various national CSOs working on human rights and transitional justice, women's and children's rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and the rights of persons with disabilities.

Facilitators included representatives from the Office for the establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court (OWECC), the Independent National Commission for Human Rights (INCHR), the Ducor Institute, as well as UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, and the Resident Coordinator Office.

Through four different modules, participants were able to gain or strengthen their knowledge of basic human rights principles and the human rights-based approach; transitional justice notions, pillars, and the role of the UN; gender, child, and diversity-responsive approaches; and CSO participation in TJ processes, notably monitoring and reporting of violations, engagement and advocacy, and public outreach and awareness raising strategies and methodologies.

The trainees actively engaged with the facilitators and one another and applied the newly acquired knowledge through several plenary discussions and group discussions focused on case scenarios throughout the two training days."

## Redefining Leadership: How Women are Shaping Liberia's Future



2 - Ma Fatu Kanneh, County Council Co-chair ( Photo: Alana Pradhan @UN Women)

Within local governance structures in Liberian communities, a quiet revolution is unfolding — one that's breaking through centuries of tradition and cultural barriers, thanks to a group of brave women determined to lead. *"We are telling the men that anything they can do, we the*

*women can do it. They are listening to us now,”* says Esther Mulbah, Bopolu Peace Hut Chairperson in Gbarpolu County. Her voice is steady, but there’s a quiet power in her words — a power that has slowly shifted the way her community thinks about women and leadership.

When Esther reflects on the past, she remembers a time when women’s voices were silenced by tradition. For generations, the idea was clear: politics and leadership were men’s work. Women were to support, not lead, the peace hut women explained. But something has changed.

The change didn’t happen overnight, nor did it come easily. But it started when women in Gbarpolu began to speak up—not just about their rights, but about what they could offer as leaders. They became active participants in the **Transformative Leadership and Community Engagement for Women’s Participation in Politics and Peacebuilding** project, funded by the Government of Ireland and supported by UN Women. This initiative wasn’t merely about teaching women to lead—it empowered them to believe that they *could* lead and showed them the path to do so. Through leadership and mediation training provided by the project in partnership with organizations like Sister Aid Liberia and the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), the women were equipped with the tools to mediate conflicts and guide their communities towards positive change.

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**“We are telling the men that anything they can do, we the women can do it. They are listening to us now.”**

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3 - Ma Zoe Teasley, Gbarma Peace Hut Chairperson ( Photo: Alana Pradhan @UN Women)

Esther's story is not an isolated one. Across Liberia, women like Jestina Dukuly have stepped forward. “Before the training, I was afraid. But after the training, I was brave and decided to run in the election,” says Dukuly, who is now the District Commissioner of Bopolu in Gbarpolu

County. Her election wasn't just a personal victory—it was a signal to the women around her that their voices mattered, that their leadership was necessary.

“Anything a man can do, a woman can do,” she says with conviction. It’s a simple statement, but one that still carries weight in Bopolu District where leadership roles were once only open to men. Dukuly’s rise to power wasn’t just a career achievement—it was proof to other women that they too could challenge long-held norms.



4 - Bopolu District Commissioner, Jestina Dukuly ( Photo: Alana Pradhan @UN Women)

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**“Before the training, I was afraid. But after the training, I was brave and decided to run in the election.”**

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The project is not just transforming women’s lives—it’s also reshaping the perceptions of men. The project’s workshops on positive masculinity have helped shift the attitudes of many men in Gbarpolu. One such ally is Sam Zinnah, the Gbarpolu County Superintendent, who has become a vocal advocate for gender equality. In a region where male-dominated leadership has been the norm for centuries, Zinnah has seen firsthand how changing the mindset of men can open up spaces for women. *“We live in a traditional society where our culture dictates that we look at women as maybe second, but I believe that the same thing men can do, women should also have the opportunity to do it.”*

Zinnah's support isn't just a nice gesture—it's a necessary shift in a culture where men have long been the gatekeepers of power. His recognition of women's potential to lead has contributed to a broader, more inclusive understanding of leadership. And while the changes are still in progress, Zinnah is hopeful. *“When women are empowered, they empower others,”* he says, acknowledging the ripple effect that women's leadership has across communities.

Musu Massaquoi, from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in Gbarpolu, knows this struggle all too well. *“We need to bulldoze the forest to reach the women in hard-to-reach areas,”* she says. In these communities, women still face challenges due to poor road accessibility, remoteness, limited education, and deeply entrenched cultural norms that view leadership as a male domain.

As of 2024, women occupy just 11% of local government positions, a modest rise from 8.5% in 2017. At this rate, gender parity in governance could take another century, emphasizing the urgent need for reforms to create more space for women to lead.



Caption: Peace Hut Women and Participants of the Transformative Leadership project ( Photo: Alana Pradhan @UN Women)

But despite the challenges, the successes are undeniable. The women who have been part of this project are proving that with support, determination, and education, barriers can be broken. *“We are committed to continuing our work with Liberian women, particularly in areas like political participation,”* says H.E. Gerard Considine, the Ambassador of Ireland who has witnessed the transformative power of women in politics. The road ahead may be long, but for the women of Gbarpolu County, the future is one where their voices will be heard, their leadership will be respected, and their rights will be championed.

For Esther, Dukuly, and the many other women leading this change, it’s clear: the moment has arrived. They are the leaders of tomorrow—and their communities are already feeling the impact of their courage.



## Totota Peace Hut Setting the Pace for Rural Women Empowerment

The thriving, lively rural town of Totota, Bong County will never be the same, according to women beneficiaries of the Totota Peace Hut. "This town is growing and changing in terms of mentoring and improving the attitude, skills, and public-speaking confidence of women so we can reach to that height we all aspire to acquire in life," said Annie G. Saah, 53, member of the peace hut and Chairlady of the One Voice Group.

"Our peace hut in Totota has helped in improving the lives of women and young girls. Through this peace hut, women and girls have gained valuable skills in literacy, computer training, group and individual farming, village savings and loan scheme as well as conflict resolution and mediation outreach at household and community-levels, and I am one such example. I have my individual potatoes garden, my house-side bag garden together with a group farm. We use the proceeds for our children's tuition and other family needs," added Annie G. Saah.



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**"Through this peace hut, women and girls have gained valuable skills in literacy, computer training, group and individual farming, village savings and loan scheme as well as conflict resolution and mediation outreach at household and community-levels"**

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*5 - Annie (left) and Miatta in their backyard vegetable gardens in Totota*

Annie, Miatta Borbor, and nearly 50 other women meet at the peace hut on a weekly basis to support one another in peacebuilding, literacy, computer skills, petty business management, and small-scale farming. "Thanks to UN Women, Plan International, Orange Foundation, and the Peacebuilding Fund for their support in giving women the skills they need to become marketable and active contributors not just to our families but also to the community of Totota," said Miatta Borbor, a member of One Voice Group at the peace hut.

True to Annie and Miatta's words on the empowerment of women, in November 2024, during an indoor programme at Totota Peace Hut in Bong County, visiting Peacebuilding Commission Chair and Sweden's Ambassador to the UN in New York, Amb. Nicola Clase and delegation witnessed a life-changing moment. Three formerly illiterate women - Mary Sheriff, Gbentelo Kennedy, and Oretha Jallah - proudly demonstrated their peace hut-acquired literacy skills by writing their names and telephone numbers on paper to the admiration of the visitors. The audience applauded them for their literacy achievements. Ma Mary Sandiman, Chairlady of Totota Peace Hut, then emphasized the need to continue the peace hut: "This peace hut must continue here so more women can learn to read and write and to enhance women's unity so women themselves can drive the change they need."



*6 - Women displaying writing skills*



*7 - Women displaying writing skills*

The vegetable gardens, small businesses, the conflict mediation roles, and the computer training have all had tremendous impact on women beneficiaries by enabling them to earn

money, support their households, participate in public and community discussions, and enhance peaceful co-existence among people. Rev Fahnlon A. Mulbah, Coordinator of the Orange Digital Center (ODC) within the Totota Peace Hut, underscored the life-improving results of the peace hut and the ODC on young women. “Computer literacy is a globally required skills area especially for women and girls to earn income and advertise their work on phone and on a computer.” He disclosed that Grace Pope, a resident of Totota, acquired digital skills in the application of cell phone for business and started advertizing and doing Orange Mobile Money, and then relocated to Monrovia where she’s living and working.

The empowerment and results-oriented achievements at the Totota Peace Hut was made possible through the seamless collaboration among UN Women, Plan International, Government of Liberia, Orange Foundation, and other partners with funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund. Each organization lent its own comparative advantage, garnered resources, and provided backstopping and technical inputs to make the peace hut functional and effective.

Peace huts across Liberia have become a useful model for driving rural women’s collective empowerment. According to UN Women, the women of Liberia gained national and international acclaim as champions of peace through their mass action campaign that pressured warring factions to agree to a peace settlement in 2003. As part of this effort, the women, under the banner “Liberian Women Mass Action for Peace”, launched the Peace Hut model in 2004 to provide a space for community women to discuss issues of peace, including ongoing community and domestic violence. Since then, the Peace Huts have evolved into a multi-faceted platform that promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women especially in rural communities.

## From Despair to Purpose: Kelvin's Story of Redemption through UNICEF Liberia's Support



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**"They taught us the importance of being role models, of contributing positively to our communities."**

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Kelvin Reeves, 25, grew up in a modest community in New Kru Town, Liberia. Life took a difficult turn after the loss of his father during his high school years, which soon left him feeling overwhelmed by responsibility and grief. With a pregnant girlfriend and a family struggling financially, Kelvin recalls feeling trapped. "I was still a student with no means to support my girlfriend or my mother," he reflects. The pressure weighed heavily, pulling him into harmful choices, from alcohol to marijuana, all in an attempt to cope.

This dark period seemed endless. But just as hope was fading, a friend introduced him to "Let Us Learn", a program designed to assist youth like him, supported by UNICEF. "The program felt like a lifeline," Kelvin explains. He joined the sessions, beginning with counselling, and moved on to life skills workshops that opened his eyes to new possibilities. He began to understand the destructive effects of substance abuse and the potential of his own future. "They taught us the importance of being role models, of contributing positively to our communities."

"After a severe reaction to alcohol mixed with marijuana, I was unconscious for days," he recalls. "That experience scared me and motivated me to quit." The transformation was gradual. The more Kelvin learned, the more he lost interest in alcohol, distancing himself from the friends



who encouraged his previous lifestyle. But it wasn't without struggle; he faced relapse, yet continued attending Let Us Learn Program's classes and mentoring.

Eventually, Kelvin's journey took a promising turn as he became a peer educator within the Let Us Learn Program in Liberia, sharing his story with young people facing similar struggles. Kelvin was a passionate advocate, going into communities to discuss the dangers of substance abuse. The program also offered vocational skills training, where Kelvin learned hospitality skills, equipping him with a foundation for employment. He quickly became known as a reliable young man with potential, and even secured a contractor role with Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation, which eventually became a full-time position. "I took everything I learned, from customer service to discipline, and applied it," he explains with pride.

Education had always been Kelvin's goal, though circumstances held him back. But thanks to connections made through the program, he found support to attend United Methodist University, where he studies political science. Kelvin speaks of this journey with gratitude. "My dream of an education felt impossible," he reflects, "but UNICEF and Let Us Learn Program gave me purpose."

Now a senior student and a government employee, Kelvin envisions a future where he continues to uplift others. With his past struggles behind him, he remains committed to the Let Us Learn Program, even volunteering as a mentor for newcomers. Reflecting on his journey, Kelvin is proud of his accomplishments and looks forward to helping other young Liberians achieve theirs, crediting UNICEF's ongoing support as the key to his transformed life.

"I owe this second chance to UNICEF," he says, a proud father to his seven-year-old daughter. "They gave me a sense of belonging and made me believe in a future that once seemed out of reach."

## Government of Liberia launches the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development-AAID- President Boakai calls for collective efforts



*8 - Copies of the National Development Plan and the County Development Plans*

The Government of Liberia on January 15th, in Buchanan, Grand Bassa, launched its National Development Plan- ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development- aimed at transforming Liberia's infrastructure and systems.

During the presentation of the national development plan, Finance and Development Planning Minister Augustine K. Ngafuan acknowledged the challenges faced and recognized the necessity to address them. He stated that the AAID aims to achieve ambitious socioeconomic progress. Among the goals articulated in the plan is a 37 percent increase in GDP, which is anticipated to grow the economy from US\$4.75 billion to US\$6.5 billion.



*9 - Minister Ngafuan speaking during the AAID Launch*

“This growth will also result in a 23.6 percent increase in per capita GDP, rising from approximately US\$850 to US\$1,050,” he added.

Minister Ngafuan emphasized, “On the human capital front, the plan aspires to extend life expectancy from 60 to 65 years, reduce the maternal mortality rate from 742 per 100,000 to 440 per 100,000, and lower the multidimensional poverty rate from 45 percent to 36 percent. These and other socioeconomic achievements are expected to improve Liberia's ranking on the SDG index by seven places, moving from 152 out of 166 countries to 145 out of 166.”

He stressed that the plan marks the beginning of building the new superstructure for Liberia's development in the next five years, underpinned by the principles of inclusiveness, sustainability, transparency, and accountability.

He explained that the AAID and the CDAs are anchored in the National Vision 2030 and aligned with global, continental, and regional frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, ECOWAS Vision 2050, and the Doha Program of Action.

He also applauded the support from the UN Liberia Country Team, UNECA, the Joint SDG Fund and other partners.



10 - UN RC Christine Umutoni, speaking during remarks at the AAID Launch

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**"Our nation is rich in resources, yet we continue to face significant challenges such as high unemployment, low literacy rates, widespread poverty, poor infrastructure, and structural inequalities. The AAID and CDAs present strategies supported by ambitious programs, aimed at addressing multidimensional poverty affecting a significant portion of our population" - H.E. Joseph Nyumah Boakai, President of Liberia**

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The UN Resident Coordinator, Madam Christine Umutoni, speaking on behalf of the United Nations System and the entire development partners' community in Liberia, noted that it was a profound honor to join you at the historic moment in Liberia's development journey. "Today, we celebrate the launch of the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID), Liberia's National Development Plan (NDP) for the next five years. This event represents far more than the culmination of a planning process—it is a defining moment shaped by national ownership and broad-based participation. "

She stated that through extensive consultations across the country and among the diaspora, Liberians from every walk of life—youth in urban centers, farmers in rural areas, civil society organizations, and the private sector—have contributed their voices to this transformative document. "This inclusivity makes the AAID truly a plan of the people, by the people, and for the people. Thank you for allowing development partners to be part of this process through technical and financial support but also through sharing ideas in different committees" -RC Christine Umutoni.

She reiterated that the United Nations and development partners stand as steadfast allies in this journey. "By leveraging our collective resources, fostering innovation, and ensuring shared accountability, we can bring call our support together to accelerate progress toward Liberia's development goals", she concluded.

Pres. Boakai, speaking upon receipt of the AAID, emphasized that achieving Liberia's ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID) and County Development (CDA) Agendas required a collective effort from Liberians, stressing the importance of good governance, a revitalized economy, modernized infrastructure, and improved education and healthcare.

H.E. Joseph Boakai stressed the need to amplify the voices of women, youth, and vulnerable citizens, stating that unity and inclusion are essential for overcoming poverty and inequality. Pres. Boakai said the National Development Plan represents not just a plan, but a shared vision, a bold commitment, and a renewed sense of purpose to secure continuous implementation of the Liberia 2030 Vision, leading to a brighter future for every Liberian.

He further stressed that the implementation phase is essential for all government institutions to realign their plans and operational frameworks to ensure their budgets reflect the goals of the ARREST Agenda.

Said President Boakai, "Our nation is rich in resources, yet we continue to face significant challenges such as high unemployment, low literacy rates, widespread poverty, poor infrastructure, and structural inequalities. The AAID and CDAs present strategies supported by ambitious programs aimed at addressing multidimensional poverty affecting a significant portion of our population. The AAID calls for a mindset shift that recognizes the potential within every Liberian to drive national development, with the support of our international development partners."





11 - H.E. Joseph N. Boakai, President RL, speaking at the Launch of the AAID

*"This joint programme is supported by the Joint SDG Fund. We sincerely appreciate the contributions from the European Union and the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland in accelerating progress towards the SDGs."*

## Strengthening Liberia's Food Safety Systems: Tailored Business Plans to Boost Liberia's Food Safety Institutions – LiSA, LACRA & NaFAA

Earlier in March, we were thrilled to welcome our Business Development and Sustainability Plan (BDSP) consultant to Liberia! The visit, which took place from March 1 to March 8, 2025, was part of the ongoing efforts under the EU-funded Liberian Food Safety Initiative aimed at Boosting trade and safe consumption of locally produced food by enhancing food safety practices and compliance along selected value chains (Rice, Fish, Cassava, Cocoa & Coffee).

Throughout the week-long mission, the Business Development and Sustainability Plan consultant worked closely with three critical institutions: the Liberia Agricultural Commodities Regulatory Authority (LACRA), the Liberia Standards Authority (LiSA), and the National Fisheries

and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA). Each of these institutions plays a unique and essential role in upholding food safety, improving product quality, and supporting the competitiveness of Liberia's agriculture and fisheries sectors.

The core objective of the consultant's visit was to facilitate the development of tailored business development and sustainability plans for each institution. These plans are being designed not only to improve the operational efficiency and financial sustainability of these bodies, but also to help them evolve into more resilient and responsive service providers. By identifying key areas for institutional strengthening, improving internal systems, and outlining actionable steps for long-term viability, the plans will serve as blueprints for transformation.

In practical terms, the support provided will enable LACRA, LiSA, and NaFAA to enhance their service delivery, enforce food safety standards more effectively, and provide better support to farmers, processors, exporters, and other stakeholders across the value chain. This work is critical in ensuring that consumers in Liberia and beyond have access to safe, high-quality food products while also helping local businesses meet international market requirements.

More broadly, the Business Development and Sustainability Plan process forms a key pillar of the Liberian Food Safety Initiative's vision to build a resilient, market-driven food system. By empowering national institutions with strategic guidance and sustainable frameworks, the initiative aims to unlock greater market opportunities, boost the competitiveness of Liberian products on the global stage, and drive inclusive economic growth.



## Breaking Barriers: Maima G. Manobah's Journey

In a male-dominated industry, Maima G. Manobah refused to let barriers define her. From an uncertain graduate to Inventory Control Coordinator at CFAO Mobility Liberia, her journey is one of resilience and ambition. Maima G. Manobah stood in the bustling warehouse of CFAO Mobility Liberia, her eyes scanning the neatly organized shelves filled with automotive spare

parts. It was a far cry from where she had started just a few years ago. Back then, she had been a fresh graduate from the University of Liberia with a BBA in Management and Accounting but unsure of where her path would lead. Today, she is the Inventory Control Coordinator, a role she had earned through hard work, determination, and an unyielding desire to prove herself in an industry dominated by men. “What inspired me to pursue this career path is working in an industry where men dominate,” Maima often said. “It challenges me to push myself and do more. It motivates me.”

Maima’s journey began when she joined CFAO Mobility Liberia, then known as CICA Liberia, as a Parts Assistant. The automotive industry was entirely new to her, and the learning curve was steep. She didn’t know how to locate spare parts or identify which part belonged to which vehicle. But Maima was not one to back down from a challenge. She threw herself into her work, asking questions, taking notes, and learning everything she could from her bosses and colleagues. “Coming from university and entering the automotive industry, everything was new to me,” she recalled. “But over time and with the help of my bosses, I learned, I grew, and I was eventually promoted to Inventory Control Coordinator.” Her dedication did not go unnoticed. Every six months, her progress was monitored, and her performance evaluated. Each review brought new opportunities for training and growth.

Maima embraced these opportunities, constantly pushing herself to learn more and do better. “I feel I have reached a certain level,” she said with pride. “While I’m still learning, I now feel confident competing with my male counterparts.” Her hard work eventually led to promotion. Maima was appointed Inventory Control Coordinator, a role that required her to oversee daily stock orders and manage the entire inventory. It was a significant achievement, but Maima didn’t stop there. She continued to set goals for herself, reviewing her progress regularly and striving to overcome any challenges that stood in her way. “I set goals within a time frame, then review them to see what I have achieved, what I haven’t, and what challenges held me back,” she explained. “I encourage other women to do the same—set goals, work hard, and track their progress.”

One of the proudest moments of her career came when she was selected to travel to Cameroon for parts manager training. It was an opportunity usually reserved for managers and after-sales directors, but Maima’s exceptional performance had earned her a place among them. “Being selected to travel to Cameroon for parts manager training was a proud achievement for me,” she said. “Although I had not yet reached that level, I was there among other managers and after-sales directors, representing my department.”

Maima’s journey was not just about personal achievement. It was also about paving the way for other women. In an industry where men were the majority, Maima had carved out a space for herself, proving that women could excel in any field if they remained focused and determined.

“I’m proud to have a job where I can now support my family and be a role model for other women,” she said. “I want to encourage women out there to stay focused, be career-driven, set goals for themselves, and remain committed.” As Maima looked around the warehouse, she felt a sense of pride. She had come a long way from the unsure young graduate who had once struggled to identify spare parts. Now, she was a confident professional, capable of competing with her male counterparts and inspiring others to follow in her footsteps.

CFAO Mobility Liberia is a key industry partner in UNIDO’s Youth Rising project, providing support to the development of an updated Automotive Curriculum and internships for young Liberians. Through this work, CFAO Mobility Liberia is helping to bridge the gap between education and employment. Through this commitment to workforce development, the company is empowering the next generation of Liberian professionals to follow in Maima’s footprints and thrive in technical industries.

On International Women’s Day, Maima’s story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of gender equality and the need to support women in all industries. “Stay determined, work hard, avoid distractions, and remain focused,” she often advised. “For me, I set goals within a time frame, then review them to see what I have achieved, what I haven’t, and what challenges held me back.” Her journey is far from over, but she knows that with hard work and determination, she could achieve anything she set her mind to.

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**“I want to encourage women out there to stay focused, be career-driven, set goals for themselves, and remain committed.”**

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## Liberia and the UN Chart United Path for Inclusive Growth

In a powerful call to action, Liberia's Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan, urged all development partners to rally behind the country's ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID) and the 15 County Development Agendas (CDAs). Speaking at a high-level Government of Liberia–UN Strategic Policy Dialogue in Monrovia, Minister Ngafuan emphasized the importance of aligned, outcomes-driven collaboration to achieve tangible benefits for the Liberian people.



12 - Liberia's Minister of Finance Augustine Ngafuan

On behalf of President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Minister Ngafuan highlighted Liberia's shift towards program-based planning and budgeting, focusing on long-term priorities. "We are committed to the vision of a developed and prosperous Liberia," he affirmed, calling on all partners to align their efforts with the country's development goals.

The Liberian government has already taken significant steps, allocating US\$106 million in the 2025 Draft National Budget to key sectors aligned with the AAID, CDAs, and international frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Africa's Agenda 2063. Notably, 83% of AAID initiatives support SDG priorities, particularly in economic growth, education, and justice.

UN Resident Coordinator Christine N. Umutoni praised Liberia's development achievements, including reductions in maternal mortality, strides toward gender parity, and democratic progress. However, she also highlighted persistent challenges such as high poverty rates, limited investment in agriculture and health, and vulnerabilities from external shocks.



13 - UN RC Christine Umutoni

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**“This is a pivotal moment. “Let’s turn bold visions into actionable outcomes for every Liberian.”- UN RC Christine .N. Umutoni**

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Madam Umutoni emphasized the need for the 2030 Agenda and the upcoming United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2026–2030 to be grounded in Liberia’s realities and aspirations. “This is a pivotal moment,” she noted. “Let’s turn bold visions into actionable outcomes for every Liberian.”

With a US\$8.4 billion National Development Plan on the table, and over 60% of the funding already pledged, Liberia is demonstrating its commitment to leadership and stronger partnerships. Both the Government and the UN reaffirmed their dedication to transparency, mutual accountability, and a people-first approach.

As the dialogue concluded, one message was clear: together, Liberia and its partners can build a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous future—one that leaves no one behind.





## UN Liberia Holds Strategic Prioritization Retreat- Seeks to Align Priorities with National Development Plan



14 - Cross-Section Participants

The United Nations (UN) and the Government of Liberia (GoL) in February, convened a pivotal Strategic Prioritization Retreat at the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Ministerial Complex. This two-day event marked a significant step in crafting the new UN Cooperation Framework (UNCF) for Liberia, set to guide development efforts from 2026 to 2030.

The retreat brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government officials, county superintendents, development partners, private sector representatives, and civil society actors. Participants engaged in in-depth discussions to align strategic priorities with Liberia's ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID) and global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063.

UN Resident Coordinator Christine Umutoni opened the retreat, urging attendees to seize the moment to reflect, align, and recommit to a shared vision of sustainable development for Liberia. Key sessions focused on linking national priorities with global agendas, developing actionable outcomes, and ensuring inclusivity and participation.



15 - UN RC Christine Umutoni

In the lead-up to the retreat, multi-stakeholder consultations were held, gathering insights from civil society organizations, youth, women-led groups, persons with disabilities, the private sector, academia, media, local authorities, and development partners. These consultations enriched the UN Cooperation Framework design with diverse perspectives and recommendations.

The retreat underscored the importance of human rights, gender equality, and the principle of leaving no one behind. The outcomes will guide the formulation of the new UNCF, ensuring it addresses Liberia's most pressing needs and aligns with global development goals.





## Enhancing Liberia's Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (EmONC) to prevent maternal and newborn deaths.

Liberia has made progress in reducing maternal mortality from 1072 deaths per 100 000 live births in 2013 to 742 by 2020. However, the country still has one of the region's highest maternal mortality burdens. Limited access to quality obstetric care is a key factor contributing to the high maternal and newborn deaths. To tackle this challenge, the country aims to achieve improved access by ensuring the availability of five basic Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (BEmONC) facilities and one comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (CEmONC) facility per 200,000 population. With support from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) strengthened the capacity of 80 nurses and midwives in EmONC in Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu and Montserrado counties.

"Before this training, I had a limited understanding of all the gaps in care that contribute to maternal deaths," says Nyemimah Williams, a midwife, nurse, and deputy administrator of maternity hospital at the JFK Medical Center Compound. "Now, I learned the skills to proactively provide timely and respectful maternity care. By implementing these techniques in our hospital, I am determined to significantly reduce the maternal and neonatal deaths, particularly due to postpartum hemorrhage and preeclampsia at our hospital," she adds.

This ten-day training, encompassing 13 modules, focused on building practical obstetric and newborn care and resuscitation skills. Under the guidance of WHO, national trainers and county facilitators from the MOH, knowledge and skills were transferred through a combination of lectures, interactive sessions, scenario-based learning, and hospital clinicals, and Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) facilitated by the prescribed checklists.

"Building on observations from last year's mentorship program which revealed capacity gaps among midwives and nurses, this initiative addressed lifesaving interventions to urgently reduce

maternal and neonatal mortality. In the first round, we prioritized hard-to-reach health facilities with high maternal mortality rates and the key referral hospitals in Montserrado with plans to expand this vital training to other regions,” says Farzee Johnson, Maternal Health Coordinator at the Ministry of Health. “We thank WHO and the Susan Thompson Buffet Foundation for their instrumental support and collaboration, which have been crucial to the success of this training,” she added.

At the end of the workshops, each healthcare facility in Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu and Montserrado counties will have the technical capacity to provide EmONC services and hence prevent maternal and newborn deaths.

“These trainings are essential to strengthening sexual reproductive health care services holistically by contributing to improved skills and competence of healthcare providers,” states Dr Musu Julie Duworko, WHO Liberia Family Health and Population Advisor. WHO, with support from the Susan Thompson Buffet Foundation, aims to also enhance the capacity of healthcare facilities through the provision of equipment for SRH care.

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**“These trainings are essential to strengthening sexual reproductive health care services holistically by contributing to improved skills and competence of healthcare providers.”**

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## Rwanda's Resilience and Liberia's Reflection: A Journey of Hope and Reconciliation



In a poignant ceremony held in Monrovia, Liberia, Rwanda's Ambassador to Liberia, Rosemary Mbabazi, delivered a powerful message on the importance of remembering and learning from the past. Addressing the gathering, she emphasized that genocide is never accidental but a result of careful planning and execution. "This must never happen again," Mbabazi stated firmly. "Every human life matters — whether from the richest nations or the poorest."

Over 300 people from Government, diplomacy, UN Liberia, academia, and youth joined the Rwandan community in Liberia for a commemorative symposium on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi where various stakeholders discussed the effects of hate speech and Representing the United Nations, Resident Coordinator Christine Umutoni read a part of UN Secretary-General António Guterres' message for the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 genocide. Guterres' words resonated deeply with the audience: "We must stem the tide of hate speech and stop division and discontent from mutating into violence. On this day of remembrance, let us commit to vigilance, action, and unity to build a world of justice and dignity for all."the ideology of genocide.

As Rwanda and the world reflect on one of humanity's darkest chapters, the commemoration in Monrovia served as a stark reminder for Liberia: peace is fragile, and justice is non-negotiable. The event underscored the importance of vigilance and unity in preventing such atrocities from recurring.

Despite its tragic past, Rwanda has emerged as a beacon of resilience and renewal. Ambassador Mbabazi highlighted the nation's remarkable transformation under President Paul Kagame, attributing the success to self-reliance and homegrown solutions. "While external help is important, we realized that the solutions must first come from within," she noted.

Today, Rwanda's post-genocide recovery is evident in its strong economic performance, with an average GDP growth rate of about 8%. The country has made substantial progress in healthcare, education, infrastructure, and governance. However, perhaps the most extraordinary achievement is Rwanda's commitment to national reconciliation. "Hutu, Tutsi, now live together in peace," the ambassador explained. "Perpetrators have returned to their communities, and many have reconciled with survivors' families. The children of perpetrators are not blamed for the sins of their parents. Everyone is given equal opportunity to thrive."

She described how some former perpetrators now lead civil society organizations focused on healing, while survivors receive support through reintegration initiatives and inclusive community programs.

Ambassador Mbabazi also praised Liberia's own journey of recovery following its 15-year civil war, drawing parallels between the two nations. "Liberia is doing an amazing job in reconciliation. I see strong commitment from the current leadership to deliver for its citizens," she said. "Yours was 15 years of war; ours was five. Yet look at your progress."

She highlighted Liberia's achievements in areas such as health, education, agriculture, and national security, and celebrated the strengthening ties between the two nations. Over 4,000 Liberian students, she revealed, are currently studying at Rwandan universities—a testament to the growing academic and diplomatic bonds.



## Revitalizing Liberia's Cocoa Sector: How IFAD is Powering an Agricultural Comeback



FASAWALAZU, LOFA COUNTY — Liberia's cocoa sector is witnessing a remarkable revival as smallholder farmers, supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) through the Ministry of Agriculture, transition from subsistence rice farming to high-value cocoa cultivation in a bid to boost income and strengthen food security. In the remote village of Fasawalazu in Lofa County, 25 farmers, including 11 women, under the Fasawalazu Kuu Group, are preparing to transplant over 27,000 hybrid cocoa seedlings this June. The initiative is part of a broader national effort to rejuvenate cocoa farming and support rural communities.

Fasawalazu hosts one of 60 cocoa nurseries in Lofa County, funded by IFAD, with over 1,600,000 cocoa seeds being nursed to supply farmers. This initiative supports Liberia's strategic push to revamp its cocoa industry, which was once a significant export sector before decades of civil unrest led to its decline.

During a recent visit to the county, Agriculture Minister Dr. J. Alexander Nuetah emphasized the strategic importance of cocoa development for the country's economic future. "This is just the beginning," Minister Nuetah told the group of enthusiastic farmers in Fazalawazu. "We now have a cocoa seed garden that will allow us to expand nationwide. If this first group succeeds, we can support even more farmers next year."

In December 2024, the group in Fazawalazu received 27,000 hybrid cocoa seeds from Côte d'Ivoire, ensuring that each farmer gets over 1,000 seedlings by June. This marks a significant step toward building Liberia's sustainable and self-reliant cocoa industry.

Minister Nuetah issued a call to action, particularly to Liberia's youth: "The future is in farming. Take this seriously, follow the instructions, and prepare yourselves well. If we succeed, greater opportunities will come."

The Fasawalazu group's success is just one example of broader progress. Since 2014, the government of Liberia, with support from IFAD, has launched several programs to breathe new life into the cocoa sector. Starting with the pilot Smallholder Tree Crop Revitalization Support Project (STCRSP), the efforts have expanded into TCEP I and II across Nimba and Lofa Counties, and later, the BCRP project, helping to cultivate over 10,000 hectares of cocoa between 2019 and 2024. These include 6,051 hectares in Nimba County, over 3,500 hectares in Lofa County, and 480 hectares in Bong County.

With global cocoa prices surging to between \$7,000 and \$12,000 per metric ton, Liberian farmers now have access to a lucrative market. Locally, prices fluctuate between \$5,000 and \$8,000 per ton, offering significant income potential. Initial projections estimate that the current cocoa farms planted since 2020 could produce between 2,000 and 3,000 metric tons per year at early maturity stages from the 10,000 hectares already cultivated.

For the upcoming planting season this year (2025), IFAD PIU, through various projects, plans to support the cultivation of 1,500 hectares of cocoa farms in Lofa County, 1,750 hectares in Nimba County, and 780 hectares in Bong County.

These efforts align with Liberia's National Agriculture Development Plan, which targets the development of 10,000 hectares of new smallholder cocoa farms over the next five years.

The resuscitation of Liberia's cocoa sector will undoubtedly open new doors for women and young people in rural Liberia. The program aims to make agriculture a viable and rewarding career by fostering inclusive participation and providing access to quality inputs, training, and markets.

## Empowering Farmers, Feeding Futures: Women-Led Cooperative Transforms Liberia's Food System Through School Meals Program



In rural Montserrado, the Destiny Women Cooperative (DWI) is transforming Liberia's food system by empowering local farmers, particularly women, to supply nutritious meals to schools through the World Food Programme's (WFP) Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP). Once struggling to find markets, DWI now processes and supplies cassava, rice, beans, and palm oil to schools, providing a reliable source of income for hundreds of farmers. The cooperative's partnership with WFP has dramatically increased cassava production, boosting farmers' earnings and enabling them to expand their farms. For farmers like Helen Umbugu, selling to DWI has provided financial stability and a sense of pride in feeding the next generation. The programme's impact extends beyond agriculture, improving school enrollment, attendance, and retention rates while injecting over \$1.6 million into the local economy. In 2024, WFP procured over 1,313 metric tons of locally produced food, ensuring more than 81,000 schoolchildren receive daily nutritious meals. Students like Hulen Dividen Sako, a sixth-grader at Martha Tubman School, express gratitude for the meals that help them focus on learning and inspire future ambitions. WFP Country Director Mary Njoroge highlights that the initiative is not just about feeding children but strengthening food systems, supporting farmers, and fostering educational success. As the programme expands, it continues to uplift communities, proving that home-grown solutions can address food insecurity and build a brighter future for Liberia.

## Liberia marks World Health Day with a renewed commitment to maternal and newborn health



Every year, Liberia joins the rest of the world on April 7th to commemorate World Health Day, which marks the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization (WHO) and serves as an opportunity to raise awareness on pressing health issues. Under the theme “Healthy beginnings, Hopeful futures”, the national observance took place in Bentol City, Montserrado County, bringing together government officials, international partners, health professionals, students and community members to advocate for investment and collective action in maternal and newborn health.

The inaugural event commenced with a health walk followed by the launch of the year-long campaign on maternal and newborn health. Reiterating the Regional Director’s message, WHO Liberia Officer In Charge, Dr Abdullahi Sule reminded that “Despite progress in recent decades, maternal and newborn deaths remain a critical challenge. Nearly 300 000 women die globally each year due to pregnancy or childbirth-related causes. In addition, 2.3 million babies die within their first month of life, and 1.9 million are stillborn – losses that are concentrated in low-income countries and fragile settings, primarily in the WHO African Region.”

In Liberia, for every 1000 women who give birth, seven die from pregnancy-related causes such as postpartum hemorrhage, sepsis, eclampsia and up to 37 babies born alive die in their first month of life. These figures remain one of the highest in the sub-Saharan region, highlighting a



significant need for continued and intensified efforts. In 2024, the Government of Liberia reddeclared the burden of maternal deaths a Public Health Emergency, calling for renewed accelerated appropriate interventions to urgently curb these preventable maternal and newborn deaths in the country.

“Addressing this crisis is a collective responsibility. The path to reducing newborn and maternal mortality is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive approach that tackles healthcare access, education, socio-economic conditions and cultural contexts including gender dimensions and reproductive rights,” said The Senate President Pro-Tempore, Hon. Nyonblee Karnga Lawrence, keynote speaker at the commemoration event. “On this World Health Day, the theme ‘Healthy beginnings and hopeful futures’ is not merely a slogan, but a vision that compels all of us to act urgently and with compassion,” she added.

The Maternal and Newborn Health Co-Champion in Liberia and Chair of the Senate Health Committee, Hon. Dabah M. Varpilah also urged the government, development partners, healthcare professionals to work together to make “Healthy beginnings, Hopeful futures” possible, highlighting that “Funding challenges for maternal and newborn health, such as dependency on external donor support make service delivery vulnerable to shifts in donor priority. In addition, service quality and accessibility remain a challenge particularly in rural and underserved communities where healthcare infrastructures and trained professionals are largely scarce,” she emphasized. “We have no time to delay our action. We need to increase our health budget, work closely with WHO and health partners, and develop an innovative domestic resource mobilization scheme,” She concluded.

The commemoration event also saw the attendance of the Office of the First Lady who is the Maternal and Newborn Health Champion in Liberia, the United Nations country team, represented by the UN Resident Coordinator, various government ministries and health partners, including major hospitals. Following the campaign launch, a series of activities will be carried out including outreach to students and midwives to raise awareness on maternal and newborn health issues.



## Liberia's Leaders and Partners Unite for a More Inclusive Future at National Development Retreat



Monrovia, April 17, 2025

— In a concerted move to tackle Liberia’s development challenges head-on, national leaders, international partners, and civil society actors convened at Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Ministerial Complex for the first **Government-Development Partners Retreat (DPR)**. The retreat marked a milestone in the implementation of Liberia’s ambitious national plan—the *Arrest Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID)*.



With a vision to move Liberia from a low-income to a lower-middle-income country by 2029, the AAID plan targets critical issues affecting everyday Liberians—like youth unemployment, access to quality education, and regional disparities in development. However, as traditional sources of funding shrink and global priorities shift, Liberia must now do more with less.

“Our President is fully committed to ensuring that the ambition within the ARREST agenda is realized,” declared **Finance Minister Augustine Ngafuan**. “We’re looking inward—digitizing processes, reducing waste, and increasing domestic revenue generation. But we need innovation and strong partnerships to bridge the gap.”

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**“The success of AAID will depend on our collective commitment—government, civil society, private sector, and our international partners.”- President Boakai**

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16 - Honorable Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Augustine . K. Ngafuan

The forum brought together voices across society, including youth leaders, academics, businesspeople, and international experts. They focused on rethinking development finance and promoting homegrown, inclusive strategies that meet Liberia's unique needs.

**President Joseph Boakai**, delivering the keynote address, called AAID a *"national call to action for inclusive development."* Acknowledging the complexity of issues like drug use among youth and school dropouts, he emphasized that *"the success of AAID will depend on our collective commitment—government, civil society, private sector, and our international partners."*





17 - H.E. President Joseph Nyema Boakai

Throughout the day, sessions unpacked themes ranging from regional integration and private sector growth to digital innovation and sustainable financing. **Claver Gatete**, Executive Secretary of UNECA, inspired participants with Rwanda’s transformation story—pointing to visionary leadership and strong monitoring systems as keys to real change. The retreat didn’t just discuss policy; it ignited purpose. “This is about reimagining Liberia’s development for people—especially young people—who see no future,” said **University of Liberia President**, calling higher education “*the brain thrust of national progress.*”

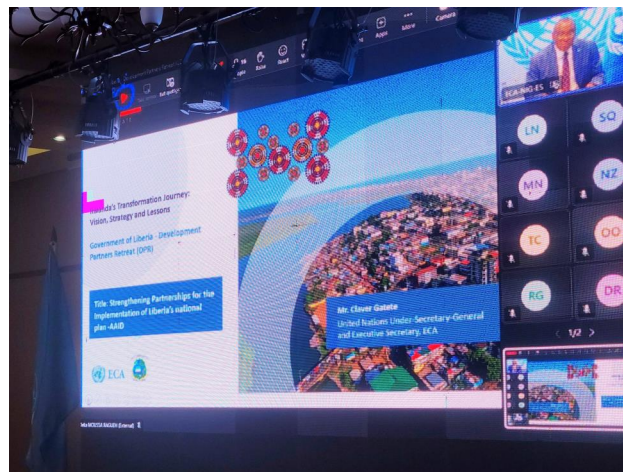
The retreat closed with a renewed spirit of cooperation and accountability. Stakeholders agreed on the need for ongoing dialogue, practical coordination mechanisms, and bold leadership to realize Liberia's development goals.

“This isn't the end—it's the beginning of a new way of working together,” said the **UN Resident Coordinator, Christine Umutoni**. “The AAID is more than a plan; it's a promise to the Liberian people.”



*18 - UN Resident Coordinator Christine.N. Umutoni*

## *Pictorial GDPR*

















*Thanks to the United Nations Communications Group for this newsletter  
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