



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.



United Nations Development Programme

UNDP'S POST-UNMIL ROLE IN LIBERIA

HELPING LIBERIA MOVE FORWARD



UNDP's Post-UMIL Role in Liberia

Since 1977, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has partnered with Liberia to aid in its development, growth, and harnessing opportunities. Within these 40 years, UNDP has been a steadfast partner of Liberia's people as they faced many challenges, the most recent being back-to-back civil wars and the Ebola outbreak.

The tenuous peace deal and instability resulting from the wars led to the deployment of the United Nations Mission for Liberia (UNMIL), which went on to play a central role in maintaining peace, and filling humanitarian and development needs, becoming the welcome and easily-recognizable face of the UN, while the United Nations agencies, including UNDP, continued their valuable work.

Now this commendable Mission is at its end. Liberia has stabilized, yet still faces a tremendous uphill climb towards its development goals. UNDP continues its journey alongside the Government and people of Liberia to achieve these aims.

The Transition

While Liberia is largely stable and has demonstrated its commitment to ongoing peace and sustainable development, it remains fragile to unexpected shocks. The 14-year conflict destabilized institutions and left echoes of mistrust in the social fabric of Liberia. The conflict's root causes remain unaddressed. Weak public institutions, economic and social inequality, land disputes and divisions in the social make-up of the country must be addressed to maintain long-lasting peace in Liberia.

In the latter part of 2017, the UN Country Team underwent a thorough capacity review in line with the objectives of the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan and Joint Government UN Transition Plan. As a result, UNDP was identified as one of the main agencies in Liberia that would be pivotal, due to its mandate, strong existing partnerships, and access to resources in place, in filling the gap left by UNMIL's departure.

This comes in tandem with a change in the State Government as in late 2017, Liberians elected George Weah to the presidency, replacing Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who had led Liberia for 12 years. Navigating renewed and revised national priorities and the exit of UNMIL also come as the UN and UNDP develop their latest five-year blueprints for action, complementing the Government's national policy framework and development strategies particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the pro-poor agenda.

With this time of transition, it is imperative that UNDP reaffirm its commitment as Liberia's reliable and trusted development partner. Furthermore, it's vital that joint programming is undertaken as an integrated approach to assisting Liberia in its goals for sustainable peace and development.

UNDP has partnered with Liberia since 1977 and is the UN's lead agency supporting sustainable development around the world



The Pan African Plaza in Monrovia, Liberia is home to the One United Nations family comprising all agencies and several partners. With the UN in one place, there is a unified effort in the UN's assistance to Liberia.
UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran

Key Pillars of the Transition

- Sustainable economic transformation
- Human rights
- Gender and social inclusion
- Youth
- Fighting corruption and building integrity systems
- Rule of law, justice and security sector reform
- Decentralization
- Constitutional reform
- Elections

Sustainable Economic Transformation

Liberia's economy is lagging. The Ebola outbreak reversed any advancements made on development gains, and also devastated an economy that was already on shaky ground. Since then, the fiscal space has contracted, commodities have plummeted and government coffers are dangerously low. A weak Liberian dollar and a 0.5 percent GDP will be further hampered by the UNMIL departure, which has also acted an economic driver for Liberia. There are signs of economic growth beginning to take shape and the new administration begins its tenure placing an emphasis on making Liberia economically attractive to national and international business investments, along with its pro-poor agenda.

What is UNDP doing?

The large portion of UNDP's support in Liberia, particularly during and after the departure of UNMIL is to contribute to a positive climate for economic growth. This includes various avenues that interconnect with other pillars like the environment, governance and public/private partnerships. Going forward, building on UNDP's core strengths as a trusted partner, UNDP is focusing on building the capacity of government institutions to deliver effectively and efficiently; focusing on small business development with special attention to women and youth, such as start-up capital, vocational and technical training, and supporting local policy to enhance the investment potential of international and national businesses; and also working closely with the government to provide cohesion and advancements in the extractive industry with namely concessions management, contract negotiations and citizen engagement. Furthermore, UNDP is pushing climate change adaptation interventions that build resilience in the face of livelihood-vulnerabilities like coastal erosion and extreme weather events.

Human Rights

The rights of the Liberian people must be upheld. Distrust and inequalities broke apart society sparking civil war as human rights were overlooked. Liberia has since made inroads towards improving its National Human Rights institutions and governance pertaining to this endeavour. Yet, the root causes of conflict persist with high rates of violence against women and girls, land rights issues, widespread corruption, and limited access to justice. More needs to be done to ensure all Liberians enjoy their rights and can live prosperous and safe lives. Sustainable peace depends on upholding human rights, and strong national institutions are the way forward.





A woman in Ganta, Nimba County, stamps her product logo on handmade soap. UNDP Photo/Lesley Wright

What is UNDP doing?

In partnership with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) , UNDP supports the new administration in its efforts to strengthen democratic governance and protect human rights. As part of its commitment to human development and achieving the SDGs, UNDP is working to improve access to justice, bolstering civil society engagement with Liberian citizens, and encouraging partnerships with regional and global human rights actors, and national human rights institutions. It will help advance dialogue amongst national human rights institutions, the legislature, civil society, local religious and community leaders, and other stakeholders to make inequalities visible, encourage dialogue, and put an end to discriminatory laws, policies and practices.

Gender and Social Inclusion

Gender inequality and social exclusion in Liberia put a massive strain on maintaining peace and achieving development goals. Ingrained and normalized gender and social roles have a chilling effect on equality, with women bearing the brunt of exclusion. Women and girls are exposed to violence, including sexual violence, with a lack of access to justice. Women and girls also remain underrepresented in politics, education, the formal economy, and social realms in Liberia.

What is UNDP doing?

UNDP works with the Government to articulate programmes that seek to improve women’s socio-economic and political status, particularly by building capacities for more gender-responsive macroeconomic policies that recognize the role of gender relations in economic development and growth; and by engendering constitutional and electoral processes and expanding women’s participation in all spheres of governmental and non-governmental governance. It will also work to reduce violence against women and to build women’s resilience to crisis and climate change. Within the sexual and gender-based violence joint programme, UNDP will support efforts that ensure women’s equal ownership, land and property rights; supporting women’s equal rights to participation in decision making; and increasing women’s participation in conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding.



Tophina Bernice Besa in West Point, Monrovia helped prevent violence during the elections after she was trained in conflict prevention as a youth monitor. UNDP Photo/Lesley Wright

Youth

Liberia is a nation of young people. Sixty-three percent of Liberians are considered youth (defined as 15-35 years old), and they are pivotal to maintaining peace and are instrumental in the achievement of the SDGs. Economically disadvantaged and disenfranchised, Liberia’s youth are said to have played a significant role in the election of Liberia’s 25th president, George Weah, who had promised youth employment as a pillar of his campaign. Liberia’s youth are also drivers of change, and their participation in peacebuilding and development are key to success.

What is UNDP doing?

As UNDP adopts its new country programme, a five-year strategy in line with government and global priorities, youth employment remains among the top concerns. UNDP will invest in an inclusive and robust employment programme linking youth with opportunities. Furthermore, youth play a large role in social cohesion. During the 2017 election, UNDP supported youth as advocates for a peaceful election, which was a success. Building on this, UNDP will further empower young people, seeking to catalyze them into a new generation of active citizens and responsible leaders in Liberia. UNDP will increase awareness on anti-corruption issues for a more focused and proactive youth involvement in the fight against corruption, through among other things, establishing a network of youth leaders who are empowered and motivated to use their dynamism and innovative minds to promote integrity and public accountability particularly with the SDGs.

Fighting Corruption & Building Integrity Systems

Corruption weakens Liberians' trust in its institutions and this skepticism underlies insecurity issues in the country. The new administration has prioritized the fight against systemic corruption as one of its main areas of work. There are notable achievements in legislation and post-conflict frameworks enacted, however, the next phase requires a push to implement this legislation. Furthermore, capacity needs to be bolstered at the ministry and sub-office levels for judicial and policing institutions.

What is UNDP doing?

UNDP has remained in the forefront in helping government fight corruption and in building integrity systems. It has pursued a multi-pronged approach: strengthen integrity institutions and making use of the laws and policies in place to fight against corruption; strengthening asset management; building civil society coalitions in advocacy work and bolstering the work of the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission (PPCC) and the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission.

UNDP's partnership with these institutions focuses on modernization and capacity development with a strong element of accountability and transparency through public awareness campaigns. UNDP will build on these gains to further strengthen the capacities of Government institutions, including law enforcement bodies to effectively tackle the challenges that Liberia faces in terms of transparency and accountability and in forging a collaborative, whole-of-government approach in which integrity institutions work together informed by a shared objective and unity of purpose.

Rule of Law, Justice and Security Sector Reform

Weaknesses in rule of law can directly fuel criminality and corruption, and exacerbate conflict and insecurity. Weak rule of law institutions are deemed to compromise the necessary oversight and safeguards against immunity and corruption, particularly the integrity of justice institutions; and inevitably the impact on economic and social development.

While significant progress has been made in restoring the rule of law, strengthening institutions and advancing reforms in the sector, including de-centralization of service delivery, review and reform of laws and policies, among other things; systemic weaknesses in the criminal justice system, including limited internal oversight, weak administrative procedures and legal framework, issues of prolonged pre-trial detention continue to cause significant delays in the delivery of justice.

The new administration has committed itself to prioritizing further investments in the sector, with an emphasis on building stronger community friendly and respectable police and security forces; operationalizing and implement the Police Act and Immigration Acts; and further institutional capacity strengthening of key rule of law and security institutions.

What is UNDP doing?

Through the Joint Rule of Law Programme, UNDP is stepping up its efforts in enhancing the capacities of, and public confidence in, the different rule of law institutions, and improving access to justice, security, and protection services, especially for women and girls. Interventions are designed with a view to ensuring sustainability and linking activities to system-level policy development. It is also investing further in institutional reform and capacity development for justice and security actors, entrenching human rights obligations monitoring and reporting, enhancing legal awareness, expanding outreach through civil society organizations (CSOs), and improving quality and integrity of service delivery.



Government services are listed on a billboard at the Montserrado County Service Centre. UNDP Photo/Lesley Wright

Decentralization

A strong government is key to Liberia’s development trajectory. In line with Liberia’s aim to decentralize, 15 County Service Centres have been set up in each county to help bring basic services to the most remote and farthest communities. There is a need to properly support these decentralized offices with planning and budget support through technical assistance and capacity development, while supporting national level ministries.

What is UNDP doing?

Drawing from lessons from Ebola, UNDP is supporting the government in accelerating decentralized service delivery bringing services closest to the people. In this regard, UNDP and UNWOMEN and with support from USAID, the European Union and The Government of Sweden, assisted with the establishment of County Service Centres, now opened in all the country’s 15 counties. They are the first visible and tangible product of the decentralization. They serve as a one-stop-shop that is strengthening participation and inclusion. UNDP will build on this to strengthen local-level coordination, foster community engagement and boost voice and participation. Investments are also being made in Liberia’s anti-corruption agency, building its capacity to identify, investigate and provide evidence for prosecution of corrupt public officials, through the provision of international training and the installation of a cyber lab in the country.

Constitutional Reform

Focus on constitutional reform and the case for its reform stems from the realization that the system of government practiced in Liberia over the years has failed and is no longer appropriate to meet citizens demands for participation in governance beyond the election of leadership of the central state. In addition, a number of contentious issues in the constitution remain unresolved, including a) citizenship – its racial definition and dual citizenship and (2) property rights – land ownership, tenure, security and distribution.

What is UNDP doing?

UNDP supported the Constitutional Review Committee in spearheading an inclusive and participatory consultative process, in which over 5,000 Liberians contributed, culminating in a National Constitutional Conference in March 2015, which saw the validation of 25 issues for policy, legislative and constitutional review. These were presented to the Legislature where they remain under review for possible referendum. UNDP is supporting sustained civic engagement, working through and with CSOs to engage citizens, deepen advocacy and sensitization on the proposals and ensure continued demand for and interest in constitutional reform. UNDP support this agenda as the new Government has committed to re-visit this issue while also ensuring that constituents are made aware of the outcome of the constitutional review process and to advocate for action.

Elections

The successful completion of the 2017 general elections marks a key milestone in Liberia’s consolidation of its nascent democracy. The process was overwhelmingly peaceful and in early 2018, the inauguration of President George Manneh Weah was the first democratic transition of power in over 70 years. UNDP and its partners are working with all levels of government, the National Elections Commission, and civil society organizations to ensure that future elections will run even smoother, and that all voices are heard and accounted for.

What is UNDP doing?

In Liberia, UNDP will build on its previous work in elections by helping the National Elections Commission train its staff on enterprise resource and planning systems, installed by UNDP in 2017, while also rolling out an asset management system that will keep track of all goods in its national network of warehouses. This will lessen the incidences of lost assets like computers and vehicles, limiting corruption and waste. Other activities outlined in the UNDP work plan for 2018 focus on the post-election period and includes support for the policy and regulatory environment and reform. This includes support to linkages to the newly established national identification scheme as well as meetings of political parties promoting conflict resolution. A set of tools will be designed to integrate into the school curriculum in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and election observer recommendations once published will be compiled and act as the foundation for a set of reform minded initiatives to promote improvements in the electoral system and administration.



A man casts his ballot in the 2017 run-off presidential election in Monrovia. UNDP Photo/Lesley Wright

UNDP Liberia would like to thank the following donors:



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

United Nations Development Programme in Liberia

Pan African Plaza
Sinkor, Monrovia
Liberia

www.lr.undp.org/

Copyright: March 2018, UNDP

Cover Photo Credits: UNDP Liberia/Lesley Wright (Top: UNDP meets with Zwedru farmers to discuss extreme weather early warning systems. Bottom: Nelly Cooper of the West Point Women for Health and Development Association greets a fruit seller outside the office.)