



## 2008 Humanitarian Highlights in Liberia: The Annual Report of the Humanitarian Coordinator

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### 1. Highlights of 2008

The humanitarian situation in Liberia continued to improve in 2008. The Government of Liberia, with the assistance of the United Nations and the entire humanitarian community, maintained focus on urgent humanitarian needs while engaging in efforts to ensure that Liberians enjoy the benefits of development in an atmosphere of peace and stability. The transition from relief to development is marked by the launch of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) that was officially presented in Berlin in June 2008.

Efforts to mobilize funding for critical activities in the lead-up to the PRS were prioritized and resulted in the March launch of the *Critical Humanitarian Gaps (CHG) in Liberia*. The CHG focused on three priority sectors – Health, Food Security and Water and Sanitation – and highlighted 19 prioritized projects valued at US\$ 28 million. Outbreaks of Yellow Fever, Cholera and Acute Watery Diarrhoea, floods, violent land disputes, and mob violence also characterized 2008. These residual humanitarian requirements underlined the need for sustained humanitarian efforts to complement ongoing development planning processes.

Liberia was also touched by the global food crisis, and an urgent CERF request for emergency agricultural assistance was approved in July. The Government of Liberia and UN partners also signed the world's first Food Security and Nutrition joint programme. The Government also took several mitigating measures to address short, medium and long-term measures, and the President was awarded by FAO Ceres Prize for her commitment to reducing food insecurity in the country.

A range of contingency planning efforts and trainings were organised in 2008, including for natural disasters, cholera, and potential refugee influxes from Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. In the case of the latter, the demise of President Conteh at year-end provided an opportunity to review the latest updated plan for Guinea and highlighted the fragile peace in the sub-region.

With the PRS, the Government has assumed responsibility for the overall coordination of humanitarian and development assistance. The Humanitarian Coordinator's Support Office (HCSO) was downsized during 2008, with the closure of its two remaining field offices. Corresponding capacity building efforts with government counterparts and UN colleagues (especially UNMIL Civil Affairs section) continued throughout the year and will continue in 2009 with the planned closure of HCSO by June 2009.

#### 1.1. **Critical Humanitarian Gaps (CHG) in Liberia 2008**

In early 2008, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Country Team identified Liberia's urgent remaining *Critical Humanitarian Gaps in Liberia* in three prioritized areas: Health, Water and Sanitation, and Food Security. Cluster leads facilitated a prioritized gap review analysis to identify sectoral priorities and put forward 19 projects valued at US \$28 million. Given the reduced humanitarian donor funding and partners, the HC and the IASC Country Team agreed on the importance to advocate for immediate targeted support to cover these most critical needs. Also given the increasing ownership on the part of the Liberian government, the CHG was cast as a complement to the Government's plan to mobilize

resources for the PRS. At the end of the year, US\$11 million had been received while almost \$17 million (61%) remained unfunded from the overall request of US\$28 million.

## **1.2. Launch of the PRS/Poverty Forum in Berlin**

The Government of Germany hosted the Poverty Reduction Forum in Berlin to present Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy for 2008-2011 to key donors, including the United Nations and World Bank, as well as to charitable foundations, private corporations and members of civil society. Partners confirmed their support to Liberia in the amount of US\$ 250-300 million for the first year of the PRS, while other pledges were made to cover the three-year period. Discussions focused on the goals and anticipated challenges during the implementation phase, with a focus on infrastructure development, including the creation of a World-Bank managed infrastructure trust fund. The three-year PRS will be central to achieving the Government's four priorities: consolidation of peace and security; economic revitalization; improved rule of law and governance; and increased infrastructure and access to basic services.

## **1.3. UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)**

Following the announcement of the reserve set aside for activities addressing the immediate impact of the food crisis, the IASC Country Team approved the submission of two proposals related to food security and nutrition. FAO's project, "*Emergency Support to Protect and Increase Local Food Production of Food Insecure Liberian Smallholders,*" was approved on 7 July, for the amount of \$1.9 million under the CERF Rapid Response window. Distribution of fertilizers and other inputs commenced in September and are 93% complete. Liberia was not considered within the Under-Funded Emergencies window as it had been in 2006-2007.

## **1.4. Resumption of Voluntary Repatriation Programme**

UNHCR had formally ended its refugee repatriation programme on 30 June 2007; however, events in Ghana the spring of 2008, including protests and the deportation of 16 refugees back to Liberia, led to the resumption of the voluntary return of refugees after diplomatic relations between the two countries were strained. The Tripartite Commission agreed to facilitate the return of an estimated 12,000 (from an approximate 27,000) refugees over a six-month period primarily to Monrovia and its environs. This included logistics support by UNMIL and also road convoys. This publicized return also prompted other spontaneous returns from elsewhere in the sub-region.

As at 31 December, a total of 9,645 (8,795 from Ghana, 281 from Guinea, 337 from Nigeria, 195 from Sierra Leone, 14 from Côte d'Ivoire, 20 from the Gambia and 3 from Senegal) have returned to Liberia since the resumption of the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees in April. In October, the deadline for the Ghana return was extended until 31 March 2009 - a further 4,000 refugees are expected to be repatriated from Ghana between January and March 2009. As of 31 December, an estimated 65,565 registered Liberian refugees remain in countries of asylum (Côte d'Ivoire - 24, 139; Ghana - 13,319; Guinea - 12,621; Nigeria - 4,401, Sierra Leone - 9,424; and a total of 1,661 in Gambia, Mali and Senegal).

## **1.5. Food Security and Nutrition**

Like other countries, Liberia was confronted by surging prices of basic commodities and fuel, and the global food crisis prompted the Government to take mitigation measures to reduce the impact on the population, especially the most vulnerable. Some of these measures included a US\$ 30 million concession for large-scale mechanised rice production and the lifting of a US\$ 2/bag rice tariff (a loss of revenue of US\$ 3 million). An advocacy “Return to the Soil” campaign was also launched to encourage Liberians to grow more food to build their self-sufficiency.

Several meetings of the Mano River Union (MRU) countries (which now includes Cote d’Ivoire), were held to discuss the impact in the region and how to encourage medium and long-term production. The most recent took place in December in Monrovia, attended by Ministers of Agriculture from the four MRU countries.

In May, UN agencies and the Government of Liberia developed the UN’s Food Security and Nutrition Joint Programme in support of the Government’s National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy for 2008-2011. The three-year programme is an integrated package that strengthens national leadership and coordination; supports development of policy, legislation and guidelines; and improves access to markets, production factors, and basic services and safety nets. The World Bank also announced that Liberia would receive US\$ 10 million to tackle the sharp price increases with funding to boost agricultural production in the country and provide a safety net for vulnerable groups.

In the late summer, a joint assessment of the impact of the rising prices was conducted in Monrovia. This was followed by a more formal national monitoring survey conducted within the framework of the National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy and led by the Ministries of Agriculture and Health and Social Welfare. The survey will track changes in nutrition indicators from the 2006-2007 Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey and will also analyze the impact of the food price crisis on food security and malnutrition. Although the survey in Greater Monrovia has been completed, it is ongoing in the rest of the counties. Results are expected by the end of January 2009.

## **1.6. Integrated Contingency Planning for Response to Natural Disasters in Liberia**

The Government of Liberia, with support from the United Nations and the Liberia National Red Cross Society, has adopted the Integrated Contingency Plan for Natural Disasters. The plan has been developed, validated and adopted by stakeholders and is now with the President’s Office (per normal procedure) for endorsement. The implementation of the Plan will help in strengthening national responsive capacity and mitigate the risk of natural and man-made disasters.

The Integrated Contingency Plan for Response to Disasters is formulated as part of the wider National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction that is being developed with the assistance from UNDP, IFRC, and UNMIL HCSO. A series of workshops were arranged to generate understanding of, and support for, disaster risk reduction policies.

### **1.7. Inter-Agency Contingency Planning for Regional Instability**

Existing 2007 contingency plans for potential refugee influxes from Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire were updated during 2008 under UNHCR's lead. The likely postponement of Ivorian elections as well as the unpredictable political and socio-economic situation in Guinea required close monitoring during 2008 in case either situation could deteriorate and lead to significant population movements over the border into Liberia.

In December, the death of the Guinean President and subsequent military coup prompted a series of emergency meetings, including participation in the two regional "Guinea+6" teleconferences, to review the existing capacities in the country (especially given the holiday season). No irregular activity or movements were cited in the region, and at year's end, the situation in Guinea appeared calm yet will be monitored closely in the coming weeks.

### **1.8. Civil Military Coordination (CIMIC) Activities**

HCSO continued to work closely with UNMIL's G5 CIMIC teams to improve coordination and collaboration with national authorities and NGOs.

During the cholera outbreak in Harper, Maryland County in December 2007 to February 2008, HCSO supported the County Health Team in its coordination efforts and liaised with G5 CIMIC who produced maps of affected communities on a daily basis. These efforts facilitated the identification of contaminated areas and the effective coordination of disinfecting water sources and hygiene promotion in affected communities. Lessons learnt from this outbreak were factored into planning for the 2008-2009 cholera season.

In 2008, HCSO supported two medical outreaches conducted in the Southeast under the overall coordination of G5 CIMIC with participation from the Senegalese Level II hospital and the Maryland County Health Team, and the Chinese Level II hospital in Grand Kru County. The Liberia National Red Cross Society and the NGOs Sight Savers International and Merlin also participated in these outreaches. Medical services were provided for approximately 900 patients in remote areas who did not have access to primary health care facilities.

In June, UNMIL co-hosted with OCHA the 84<sup>th</sup> UN Civil Military Coordination course in Monrovia. The course provided an in-depth look at Civil Military Coordination issues in the context of an integrated mission. Participants from Chad, Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, and AFRICOM attended as well as several Liberia-based NGO, UN, military staff and Liberian government representatives.

Throughout 2008, HCSO together with G5 CIMIC continued to facilitate the transport of humanitarian actors and cargo, enabling access to remote areas of Liberia. HCSO processed requests for almost 6,300 MTs of cargo to be transported and arranged several special flights to carry large equipment to remote locations for NGO projects, including support to the Watsan Consortium (an innovative NGO collaboration of six NGOs working together under one lead NGO to provide improved water and sanitation services to the most vulnerable communities).

## **1.9. Transition from IASC-led Clusters to Government-led Sector Coordination**

The completion of the PRS and development of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), both for 2008-2011, underlined the emphasis towards recovery and development in Liberia. The IASC Country Team operated as a steering committee for the Cluster Approach. Cluster Leads worked closely with their government counterparts to discuss ways to incorporate humanitarian issues -- stemming from poor access to basic services and vulnerability to natural disasters -- within the larger recovery and development agenda. The Cluster Approach was utilised both in terms of humanitarian needs assessment, planning and response through the articulation of the CHG and CERF projects to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs in the country.

Despite limited capacity, the Government line ministries participated actively in clusters and increasingly took the lead. As the Government's capacity to coordinate its own, as well as partners' efforts, strengthened, the clusters have been folded into the government-led Liberian Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC) aid coordination framework based on the PRS' four pillars.

At the county level, the County Support Teams (CSTs) are supporting sector coordination and planning, and coordination mechanisms are being put in place mirroring those at the national level. Clusters can still be activated – such as the summer resumption of the Nutrition Cluster around concerns stemming from the food crisis – to address more immediate humanitarian requirements.

## **2.0. The Phase-out of HCSO**

HCSO continued to downsize by 50% during 2008, including the closure of its last two field offices (in Harper and Voinjama). In the second half of 2008, HCSO worked closely with UNMIL Civil Affairs to build awareness of humanitarian issues at the county level so that this monitoring and support to the local authorities could continue in the absence of HCSO staff. A series of contingency planning workshops were arranged in all fifteen counties – sometimes with the Liberian National Disaster Relief Commission and UNDP – to discuss the importance of contingency planning, review existing plans and lessons from previous disasters, and clarify the roles of several actors at the local level.

HCSO now focuses less on operational coordination issues and instead provides more strategic advice on humanitarian issues and actors. It continues to host a regular Humanitarian Action Committee (HAC) meeting with UN agencies, local and international NGOs, donors, the Red Cross movement, and some government participation. This platform will likely transition in 2009 but will continue to be a neutral forum to raise issues among the range of NGO and civil society partners and present major initiatives.

The draft UNMIL budget (July 2009) responds to the expected closure of HCSO with a proposal to transfer some residual humanitarian staff to UNMIL Civil Affairs. If approved, the staff will focus on disaster preparedness and contingency planning, monitoring residual humanitarian needs, and supporting civil-military coordination. Increased collaboration with UNDP and the other UNCT members is expected throughout 2009.

A key challenge in 2009 will be to ensure that humanitarian action is seen as complementary to the Government's drive for development and maintain humanitarian issues in the national agenda. Focus will be on advocacy for humanitarian and development action with the most vulnerable populations and in underserved areas, particularly in the south east of Liberia.

Prepared by: HCSO  
Monrovia, 6 January 2009