

United Nations in Liberia

Advancing Integration - At Work Together

Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in August 2003, the security situation has steadily improved in Liberia, with a high degree of collaboration amongst all actors. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) have actively supported the government in its reconciliation, recovery and development efforts.

A number of steps have been taken to foster greater integration. The aim is not to integrate for the sake of integration but rather to be “at work together” for the benefit of the Liberian people. Alignment and harmonization of support have been drivers for improved integration to ensure aid effectiveness in a post-conflict situation.

Common Goals and Harmonized Support to National Priorities

In Liberia, it is critical to factor in the clear national leadership provided by the democratically elected Government. The overall vision and framework for the country is provided by the national Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2008-2011, which has been formulated through a comprehensive nation-wide consultative process.

The United Nations in Liberia is committed to work in support of these national priorities. UNMIL and UNCT provided joined-up policy advice (and considerable logistical support) during the preparation of the PRS and this collaboration has been further advanced through the joint development of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2008-2012, which provides a collective response of the United Nations to the PRS priorities. It has been decided to use the UNDAF framework as the main mechanism for UN integrated planning.

Integrated UN coordination mechanisms

The UN Integrated Coordination and Management Structure provides an overview of the regular UNMIL/UNCT integration mechanisms. The Strategic Planning Group (SPG), established in 2007, brings together UNMIL Section Chiefs and UNCT Representatives in bi-weekly meetings to discuss key policy and strategic issues. The model was further developed in June 2008 following the finalization of the PRS and UNDAF and is now used to oversee and manage the implementation of the UNDAF.

The UNDAF Outcome Groups have been established to ensure regular interaction between relevant UN entities within a given substantive area to ensure coordinated planning, implementation and monitoring, including a common UN voice.

The UN also works together through the Inter-Agency Programming Team (IAPT), four Functional Groups, and Groups dedicated to Cross-Cutting issues. UNMIL has continuously chaired or co-chaired some of these groups: Gender Theme Group, UN Communications Group, and the County Support Teams Technical Team. In addition, Liberia is one the first pilot countries identified for the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster global roll-out and the DSRSG/RC/HC chairs the Liberia IASC Country Team comprised of the UN, Red Cross Movement and international NGOs to set policy on the residual humanitarian needs in the country.

In the UNDAF, UN Liberia committed to implement joint programmes that brings together all relevant UN agencies and section under one framework in support of Government priorities. In addition to the County Support Teams, five joint programmes have been developed (some are in the final stages) in the following areas: Food Security and Nutrition with involvement of Civil Affairs and Human Rights; Youth Employment with RRR; SGBV with LJDSS/ HRPS/OGA; Gender with OGA and HIV/AIDS.

Integrated Field Structures

The UN in Liberia has also aimed to ensure that the UN field presence in the counties supports the objective to deliver as one. A number of elements can be highlighted:

□ County Support Teams – Support at Local Levels

The County Support Teams (CSTs) were established in each of the 15 counties in 2006 aimed at ensuring a coherent and consolidated UN approach to addressing county challenges, supporting Government, and building capacity of government institutions. It is a joint UN project, managed by UNDP working through UNMIL Civil Affairs, linking UNDP's financial resources/knowledge with the human resources of the mission. The CSTs are supported by a joint UN technical team composed of UNMIL Civil Affairs, the O/DSRSG, the RC office, UNHCR, UNOPS and UNDP. The CST is a key mechanism for implementing the UNDAF, ensuring that the United Nations responds in an innovative and joint fashion to the county challenges.

□ Deepened integration through revised Field Structure

Building on the achievements of the CSTs, a revised UN field structure was approved following a joint UNMIL/UNCT review process. The revised structure includes a new position as Head of Field Office in each county. Mission as well as UN Agency staff will have one reporting line to the Head of Field Office. The reforms also enhance the consolidated reporting requirements and common county based work planning to avoid duplication of efforts and better collective analysis.

□ Physical co-location – Joint County Offices

In June 2008 the first Joint UN Office opened in Voinjama, Lofa County, bringing together seven UN agencies – FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR, WFP, and WHO – together with UNMIL. Under the 'One UN' umbrella, the UN entities share facilities and expertise, undertake joint assessments and collaborate in planning, programming, implementing and monitoring projects in Lofa County. A second joint office opened in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, in early 2009. Physical co-location should be recognized as an important method to advance integration and bring the UN together to make use of scarce resources (assessments, monitoring, planning, generators, security guards, fuel stations etc).

The United Nations in Liberia is committed to the principle of “at work together”. The leadership throughout UNMIL and the UNCT are eager to build upon the achievements to date as well as challenge both the UN Liberia team as well as in HQ colleagues to do more to permit greater results for the benefit of the people of Liberia.