

Human Security Initiative in the Most Neglected Communities with the Integration of Efforts by the UN Country Team in Liberia



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Liberia

Duration: September 2014 to September 2017

Implementing UN Agencies: FAO; UNICEF; UN Women; UNFPA; ILO; WFP

Other Implementing Partners: National Governments; local authorities

Total Budget: \$6,246,593 (UNTFHS: \$2,569,991, pooled funding: \$3,676,602)

Key Words: Refugees; poverty; community security; youth; women

BACKGROUND

While Liberia has benefited from improved peace and security since the end of its 14 year civil war in 2003, a fragile protective environment continues to generate vulnerabilities among the population. Meanwhile, political events in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 caused a large influx of Ivorian refugees as well as Liberian returnees into the country's southeast thus placing additional stress on historically marginalized border communities. Socio-economic security remains a major concern in particular how land conflict, weak social cohesion, poor infrastructure and low incomes prevent the local population from living in dignity.

These insecurities are mutually reinforcing and cannot be tackled in isolation. Subsequently, a comprehensive approach was required to facilitate the transition from emergency to development assistance and address the gap between the support provided to the refugees and the long-standing needs of vulnerable people in the four border counties along Côte d'Ivoire. The situation also required meaningful engagement among a broad spectrum of community members in order to mitigate their disadvantages in a more demand-driven and sustainable manner.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The programme aimed to protect and empower the most vulnerable populations in south-eastern Liberia through sustainable and participatory measures. Specifically, the objectives of the programme were: (i) to nurture local leadership in social cohesion, reconciliation, and peacebuilding among communities; (ii) to improve food and economic security through improved infrastructure, employment opportunities, skills training, and strengthened agricultural groups;

(iii) to set-up comprehensive and preventive measures to respond to sexual and gender-based violence and issues related to the well-being of women and children; (iv) to strengthen the health of the local population through improved services relating to HIV/AIDS and sanitation. All interventions worked closely with local groups and reinforced their capacity to engage in community-based development.

BENEFICIARIES

The programme directly benefitted over 15,400 people and indirectly benefited 774,500 people across four counties in southeast Liberia (Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Maryland). Increased income

realized by empowered women and youth also contributed to a multiplier effect on local businesses. Government officials and NGOs further benefited from enhanced capacities.



Credit: UNCT



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NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) The programme fostered social cohesion across all levels of society by mobilizing youth volunteers and strengthening the capacities of local authorities as a preventive and sustainable approach to peacebuilding. These initiatives in establishing ethical standards and local leadership for peace benefitted over 1,000 officials and impacted 24,000 pupils in rural schools.

(ii) In addition, the agricultural based livelihoods of vulnerable populations were improved through the assistance of small landholding farmers and better accessibility to markets. Local community members were involved in the needs assessment as well as the design and implementation of the interventions to ensure societal buy-in. At the same time, economic security was sustainably enhanced through training in alternative income-generating activities and business management skills.

(iii) Furthermore, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was comprehensively tackled with the cooperation of relevant stakeholders. The establishment of 'peace huts' provided a much

needed space for women to come together and learn about their rights. These networks also became a focal point with local security personnel thus improving monitoring and reporting on the issue. Crucially, the initiative also involved religious leaders and over 200 male advocates and community elders which catalyzed a wider behavioral change leading to a more effective solution to SGBV.

(iv) Likewise, the safety and security of children was improved with enhanced protection and care through the capacity-building of social workers and police officers to better identify and management cases of child violence and abuse. Functional community level mechanisms now work with Government ministries for integrated case referral and child reintegration strategies that are people-centred for the benefit of the most vulnerable.

(v) Moreover, the concept of human security has been integrated into Liberia's poverty reduction strategy (Agenda for Transformation) due to the programme's continued strategic partnership with Government agencies.

LESSONS LEARNED

The programme demonstrated the transformational benefits of the human security approach in addressing the limited capacities of border communities still recovering from the impact of Liberia's civil war. Owing to a participatory and people-centred initiative, agents of change were recruited from the community to tackle prevailing issues such as SGBV, child abuse, and marginalization. The peace huts proved to be an effective and catalytic initiative by involving traditional gatekeepers of the community such as religious leaders and elders while empowering the most vulnerable women and youth for improved public safety. In addition, social

cohesion and conflict-prevention were enhanced through the programme's inclusive initiatives that reached out to both Ivoirian refugees and host communities in order to meet the long-standing needs of both groups. Furthermore, the food and economic security of entire communities were vastly improved through demand-driven initiatives that included better infrastructure and market access, alternative income-generating activities, and improved skills for the future. This demonstrates the value of human security in helping societies in a post-conflict context transition from humanitarian assistance to sustainable development.