

Liberia: Still Waiting...



July 2003, Liberia. Photo: World Vision/N. Macaulay Paykue

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Since UNMIL assumed responsibility for facilitating Liberia's return to stability and peace in September 2003, some progress has been made, but Liberians still face frequent and recurring violence, an ongoing humanitarian crisis, a stagnant economy, and a tepid response from international donors.

In order effectively to respond to the ongoing crisis, international responses from donors and the UN system should:

- Allocate the necessary resources quickly to mitigate against the potential for further regional de-stabilisation
- Ensure secure conditions to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance throughout the country
- Fully address the impact of violence on children
- Re-establish an effective and well-designed DDDR programme

Introduction

Almost exactly one month after the signing of the Accra Peace Accords, on September 16 2003 United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1509 established a new UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). As World Vision had recommended¹, UNMIL's mandate included substantive measures to protect civilians.

World Vision has been working in Liberia for over twenty years. Since 1995, World Vision Liberia has been carrying out emergency relief, food aid, health and agriculture programs, in partnership with the World Food Program (WFP) and other agencies. Currently World Vision operates supplementary feeding centres in six Internally Displaced Peoples camps (IDPs) with a total population of 92,795 in the Montserrado county. Additionally, the organisation provides curative, preventive and reproductive health services including health education in some of the IDP camps.

In preparation for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration part of the DDDR process, WV Liberia is working with local NGOs and communities in Bomi, Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado where the focus of attention is preparing communities for eventual absorption of IDPs, refugees and ex-combatants.

A humanitarian crisis

The fourteen years of conflict in Liberia displaced over one million people, over half displaced internally. Encouraged by the semblance of peace that has begun to return to the country, Liberian refugees are starting to return. However, the places where they settle within and outside of Monrovia lack even the basic facilities including clean drinking water, basic sanitary facilities and medical infrastructure. Education facilities are almost non-existent and even where they exist, trained teachers are few and far between. According to UN-OCHA, only 25% of Liberians have access to safe water and 36% to proper sanitation facilities. Children whose

¹ World Vision briefing to members of UN Security Council, Sept 2003

immunity systems are generally weaker than those of adults suffer acutely. The mortality rate for children under 5 years is 235 per 1000 live births.²

The Liberian government has neither the resources nor the infrastructure to support the growing influx of returning refugees and to meet the needs of all its citizens. The situation is worsened by acute levels of poverty. More than half the people of Liberia live in extreme poverty, on less than US\$ 0.50 per day.³

In recognition of the impending humanitarian crisis, the UN Consolidated Appeal requested US\$72 million for Liberia in August 2003, and was subsequently revised to request approximately US\$170 million; US\$137m for non-food items and US\$40m for food.⁴ Responses to the CAP to date have not even covered 2% of the needs⁵.

The continuing fighting affects children directly and cripples humanitarian responses

In January 2004 Human Rights Watch reported that ex-combatants continued to terrorise Liberians in areas not manned by UNMIL. These reports have been corroborated by other NGOs including World Vision. Civilians are repeatedly harassed by ex-combatants who use the arms they still carry to threaten and force them to submission. Sexual and gender-based violence as well as looting all continue with impunity.

The on-going violations are partly a result of inadequate numbers of UNMIL troops on the ground in Liberia. In November 2003 the UNMIL force comprised 5,569 personnel⁶. In January the figure increased to 9,000⁷ but that is still less than two thirds of the 15,000 mandated by the UNSC. As at January 2004, UNMIL troops were deployed in eight of Liberia's 15 counties, including Montserrado, Margibi, Bomi, Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba and Grand Gedeh counties⁸. While this is an improvement, the lack of adequate personnel means that not all volatile areas in Liberia are covered, and humanitarian activities remain concentrated in the immediate area surrounding Monrovia.

Thirteen-year old Kollie Jallah is an ex-combatant, having fought for two years for former President Charles Taylor's army. Jallah was among hundreds of child soldiers, who disarmed to UN peacekeepers overseeing Liberia's disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) program for ex-combatants. Now residing at a Catholic Church-run Don Bosco Home for street or abandoned children and ex-child soldiers, in Monrovia, Jallah receives treatment for skin diseases at a World Vision Mobile Clinic.

"I now feel much better than three weeks ago, when I arrived in this center. When I arrived my whole body was scabies and ringworms. But with medicine from World Vision (doses of Whitfield Ointment and Griseofulvin tablets) I now go to bed, wake up and move about without worrying about an itchy and irritating skin anymore."

Source: World Vision Situation Report, Jan 7 2004

Difficulties in the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR)

² UNDP 2003. Human Development Report 2003.

http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/pdf/hdr03_MDG_tables.pdf

³ UN May 2003. Liberia mid-year review.

⁴ UN OCHA 2004. Appeal for food items is contained in West Africa Appeal.

⁵ 2004 Liberia CAP: <http://www.un.org/depts/ocha/cap/liberia.html>

⁶ UNMIL

⁷ UN News Service, 15 Jan 2004. Jacques Paul Klein, during news briefing at UN Headquarters.

⁸ World Vision Situation Report, 14 Jan 2004 quoting Major Noel Duffy, responsible for military cooperation.

One of the main points on the Accra Peace Accord was the DDRR process. Similarly UNSC resolution 1509 mandated UNMIL to:

- (f) ...plan for the overall implementation of a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) programme for all armed parties; with particular attention to the special needs of child combatants and women; and addressing the inclusion of non-Liberian combatants;
- (g) carry out voluntary disarmament and to collect and destroy weapons and ammunition as part of an organized DDRR programme;

While it is estimated that Liberia has 40,000 combatants with a varied range of weaponry, UNMIL had only been able to collect 9000 weapons from 31% of the total 'ex-combatant' population. UNMIL acknowledges that more weapons exist but it has been unable to collect them.⁹

After serious miscalculations that led to confusion and dissatisfaction, UNMIL suspended the DDRR process on December 17th, seven days after its commencement, with expectation of resuming in January 2004. In January the DDRR process was postponed again until February or March 2004. In the meantime militia continue to terrorise civilians in areas where UNMIL is not present.

Despite clear mandates in both the Accra Peace Accord and the UNSC resolution 1509 on need to ensure a comprehensive DDRR process, the DDRR process was launched with insufficient preparation. For example, the process was launched without clear information on what ex-combatants were to expect in exchange for weapons. Consequently when ex-combatants were not offered the money they expected in return for arms, they went on a rampage creating unnecessary unrest.¹⁰ Additionally the processing centres where ex-combatants were to be rehabilitated were incomplete at the time of commencing the DDRR process.

Recommendations

I. Financial Resources

It is clear that as Liberia emerges from conflict the humanitarian situation is dire and made worse by a stagnant economy. Unfortunately the desperate situation in Liberia is not matched by financial commitments from donors. As at 24 January 2004, only 2% of what is needed to divert the humanitarian crisis had been raised.

The DDRR program kicked off with former Government of Liberia soldiers at their cantonment site at Camp Schiefflin military Barracks, about 35km east of Monrovia, where UNMIL had reportedly anticipated hosting not more 1,000 former fighters. On December 8, a day following kick off of the DDRR exercise, hundreds of ex-government soldiers ran riots in the eastern and northern suburbs of Monrovia, upset that UNMIL did not give them cash immediately after disarming.

About 11 people were reported killed, with several valuable properties looted or damaged during the shooting spree, which lasted two days.

Following the incident, UNMIL began paying an initial US\$75 (from a total cash package of US\$300 per person) to each ex-combatant immediately upon handing in his or her weapon.

World Vision Liberia, Situation Report Dec 17 2003

⁹ 15/01/04. Press Briefing by Special Representative for Liberia

¹⁰ Mark Doyle, BBC, 23 Jan 2004. UN's Liberia 'honeymoon' to end

Donors must act decisively at the February round table to mobilise resources for Liberia. Failure to do so could send the wrong message to the world and to African in particular, that the lives of Africans are not as valuable as those of Iraqis. Continuing instability in Liberia also threatens the stability of the Mano River Union region and beyond.

2. DDDR

The DDDR process in Liberia has to date been unsuccessful largely due to poor planning and lack of preparedness. If Liberia is to stabilise, the DDDR process must be resumed immediately. The existence of arms in the control of ex-combatants is partly responsible for on-going violence in parts of Liberia.

World Vision recommends that the resumed DDDR processes prioritises the following:

1. Appoint a lead agency with a clear mandate
2. Integrate child protection issues and the appointment of a child protection officer in all processing centres
3. Facilitate the participation of children in the design of DDDR programmes
4. Properly plan rehabilitation and reintegration components, including a programme preparing host communities for the acceptance and reintegration of ex-combatants. If donors support the disarmament and demobilization without sufficiently planning and executing the rehabilitation and reintegration components of the DDDR process, ex-combatants will feel cheated and disillusioned and this will plant the seeds for another conflict or an increase in violent crime.

3. Liberia in the longer term

The Accra Peace Accord created a transitional power-sharing government to lead the country into elections in 2006. While it is important to ensure the effective functioning of the current government, focus must also be put on the longer-term objective of peace and stability for Liberia and the return to democratic rule. International effort and resources must be dedicated toward preparing the country for elections in 2006 and to avoid at all cost a return to civil strife.

The war in Liberia had its roots deep in history, ethnic tension and corruption. In the long term therefore, donors (and all stakeholders) must invest in tackling the deep-rooted causes of conflict in Liberia and not focus only on treating the symptoms. This includes significant investment in kick starting Liberia's economy in order to create more jobs.

World Vision urges all donors and stakeholders need to ensure that they do not lose interest in Liberia once the emergency phases are over, but rather ensure that full reconstruction takes place, especially in infrastructure and social services. Stability in Liberia is key to maintaining peace in the wider West Africa Region.

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