

LIBERIA COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Geography and Demography

Liberia is located in West Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone. With a territorial area of 111,369 sq km and a tropical climate, Liberia has an annual average rainfall of 432 cm making it one of the wettest countries in the world.

The population of Liberia is 3.5 million, of which 1.8 million are children. Indigenous tribes account for over 90% of the population. Christianity, indigenous religions and Islam are the main religions in the country. Besides English, the official language, approximately 20 ethnic dialects are spoken.

Current Political and Security Situation

Following general and presidential elections in 2005, the Government of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was inaugurated in January 2006 for a six-year term. Significant progress has been made since in advocating for partnerships for the restoration of infrastructure, services, the economy and consolidation of state authority with decentralised administration at county level.

The national Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS, 2008-2011) was published in April 2008 and is based upon participatory consultation in the counties with priorities articulated through County Development Agendas (CDAs). With an overall UN response to the PRS through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), UN County Support Teams (CSTs) provide specific logistical, infrastructural and organisation capacity to county administrations.

The legacy of conflict affects all aspects of life in Liberia. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was inaugurated in February 2006 to support national reconciliation. High levels of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and gender base violence (GBV) are a major concern. Many of the conflict factors that led to Liberia's civil crisis are still to be comprehensively addressed and tensions over ethnicity, land and other issues appear to be resurfacing.

Current internal security concerns include an increase in violence and criminal activities, particularly armed robbery and theft in the capital. External security threats in the region remain and must be considered in terms of interrelated economic, social and security elements. All threats are compounded by high levels of employment, and pervasive poverty with few opportunities for legal, gainful employment for the relatively youthful population.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), a peacekeeping force established following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003, remains in Liberia with 14,000 staff including more than 11,000 international troops and 1,100 police advisors. Liberia has also recently qualified for an allocation from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

Humanitarian

The humanitarian situation in Liberia has improved and the Government is increasingly taking on responsibility to provide for its population and promote the overall coordination of humanitarian and development assistance. However, many Liberians remain vulnerable and confront acute humanitarian needs on a daily basis, especially lack of access to basic services such as health and safe drinking water.

The return of Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) was completed in December 2006, with 327,000 former IDPs assisted to return to their homes. The main programme of organised voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees concluded in June 2007, with over 160,000 returnees. However, since April 2008 the return operation resumed at a smaller scale to facilitate the return of Liberian refugees mostly based in Ghana (5,500 returnees to mid-August 2008).

Programmes for disarmament and demobilised ex-combatants (more than 100,000) are also substantially completed, with efforts now focussed on some specific skills training and community-based reintegration. Liberia hosts more than 10,000 refugees from Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and other countries.