



## Liberia Update

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### UNFPA Liberia and Swedish Govt. Sign Agreement to Address SRH Needs of Young People

On July 20, 2016 the Embassy of Sweden and the United Nations Population Fund signed a US\$ 5.3 million cooperation agreement for the implementation of a four-year project entitled *'Empowered and Fulfilled.'* Sweden is contributing a total amount of forty million Swedish Krona (SEK 40 million), approximately US\$4,670,000 over the four years of the project implementation



*UNFPA Liberia Country Representative Dr. Oluremi Sogunro and Swedish Ambassador to Liberia Ms. Lena Nordstrom at the signing ceremony in Monrovia*

while UNFPA will contribute US\$675,600 over the same period.

Liberia has a very high teenage pregnancy rate. By the age of 19 years, 3 out of 5 girls are already mothers. This threatens the very core of the Liberian society as many of these adolescent girls often fail to complete their education.

A typical adolescent in Liberia, like most parts of sub-Saharan Africa lacks knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, contraception and their attitude toward pregnancy will be far from realities of its unforeseen consequences.

Meeting the needs for sexual and reproductive health information and services of adolescents is key to preparing them for the future.

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### UNFPA Liberia and Swedish Govt. Sign Agreement Cont'd

The project is working to improve the knowledge and skills of young people between ages 10 and 19 years of age about their sexual and reproductive health and rights in the southeastern counties of Liberia including Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Maryland, and River Gee. It also strives to work at the national level to foster an enabling environment for the respect and fulfillment of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people; thereby contributing to the reduction in the high rate of teenage pregnancies in Liberia.

“The high rate of teenage pregnancies can be attributed to the slow possibilities for young people to exercise independent sexual health decision making and access information



**One in three adolescent girls aged 19 in Liberia is either currently pregnant or already experiencing motherhood**

about sexual and reproductive health and rights;” says Ms. Lena Nordstrom, Swedish Ambassador to Liberia during the signing ceremony in Monrovia.

“Adolescent girls and boys need access to youth-friendly reproductive and sexual health information and services, especially outside the urban areas;” Ambassador Nordstrom said.

“In order for young people to be able to take advantage of society’s opportunities, such as education and work, and to contribute to economic growth, young people must be given the opportunity to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sexual life, without coercion, violence, discrimination or the risk of becoming involuntarily pregnant or being infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted infections;” the Swedish envoy added.



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### UNFPA Liberia and Swedish Govt. Sign Agreement Cont'd

UNFPA has begun partnering with its key strategic partners to include relevant line ministries' structures and selected civil society organizations at national and county level in the implementation of the project.

"The programme is targeting community dwellers including in and out of school youths, traditional and religious leaders, to alter norms that promote early pregnancies;" said Dr. Oluremi Sogunro, UNFPA Liberia Representative.

"At the national level, we have made steadfast progress in creating an enabling policy environment for young people to access sexual and reproductive health information and services. Unfortunately, little has been done to translate these policies into actual programmes that can reverse the high rate of teenage pregnancies;" Dr. Sogunro said.

Dr. Sogunro added that the programme constitutes an important step toward empowerment of young people to say no to early pregnancies.

Liberia's Youth and Sports Minister Mr. Charles Saah N'tow who also attended the signing ceremony called on young people in Liberia to take advantage of every positive opportunity afforded them to better their lives. "We need to have educated young people who can ably drive the future development agenda of Liberia;" said Minister N'tow.

### MOH and UNFPA begin rolling out Tool to Monitor EmONC, Emergency obstetric and newborn care in Liberia

Several factors are said to be contributing to slowing the reduction of maternal and newborn deaths in Liberia. They include the lack of materials to practice signal functions, inadequate supply of family planning commodities, as well as emergency contraceptives and low facility deliveries by skilled health personnel.

The Ministry of Health has begun the rollout of a set of standardized tools for monitoring and supervising EmONC interventions in Liberia. EmONC, Emergency obstetric and newborn care is a package of medical interventions to treat life-threatening complications during pregnancy and childbirth. These services can save the lives of the estimated 280,000 women and 3 million newborns who die annually during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. Millions of disabling conditions can also be prevented through timely and effective EmONC.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported the revision of the tool in collaboration with the Family Health Division at the Ministry of Health using the abridged Rapid Assessment Tool developed by UNFPA West and Central Africa Region Office in May 2016. The tools when properly utilized would ensure access to medical interventions to treat life-threatening complications during pregnancy and childbirth. It can also inform decision makers on appropriate strategies for improved EmONC service provision nationwide.

The tool is built on the results of an EmONC assessment in 2010 attributing the high maternal death of Liberia to several factors such as the lack of materials to practice signal functions, inadequate supply of family planning commodities, as well as emergency contraceptives and low facility deliveries by skilled health personnel.

These findings resulted to the formulation/adoption of strategies which powered the response to bridge the identified gaps.

As part of efforts to ensure that the tool remains relevant to addressing the situation, the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with UNFPA, recently validated the tool at a conference held in Gbarnga, Bong County. The meeting was attended by other partners working in the maternal and newborn health care area including Jhpiego and USAID.



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### “Give Us the Chance to Grow” -A Teenage Girl Stresses on World Population Day 2016

Liberia joined the rest of the world to observe World Population Day on July 11. The program was organized by the Government of Liberia through the Population Policy Coordination Unit (PPCU) in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and part.

At the indoor program held in the main Auditorium of the University of Liberia to raise awareness on the day held on the theme: “Investing Teenage Girls;” the keynote speaker, Miss Satta Sheriff called on the Government of Liberia and partners to invest in the education of teenage girls.

According to her, teenage girls are faced with many challenges that impede their education. “Some of the many challenges impeding the education of teenage girls in Liberia are as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and harmful traditional practices, among others;” she said.

“It is important for the government and partners to address these things to ensure that teenage girls are given the opportunity to acquire education. Society stands to benefit greatly if it invests in the education of teenage girls.” Miss Sheriff noted.

The Speaker of the Liberian Representative Forum,



Miss Sheriff, age 16, said investing in the education of teenage girls is one of the surest ways that the government and people can hope of a brighter future.

formerly the Liberian Children Parliament used the occasion to encourage her peers to see themselves as people with great values and potential that can propel them to achieving their dreams.



## Liberia Update

### World Population Day 2016 Cont'd

Earlier, a former youth advocate, now Assistant Youth and Sports Minister, Miss Kula Fofana, outlining her experiences said teenage girls continue to bear the burden of supporting their families. “We need to bring back the family values where children will remain children. Children must be cared for by their parents until they can reach adulthood;” Miss Fofana said. She lamented the high level of teenage pregnancy resulting into girls dropping out school in the country.

Speaking on behalf of the United Nations in Liberia, UNDP Country Director Kamil Kamaluddeen called for concerted efforts if the situation of girls in Liberia must change. “Investment does not work with government and partners alone. We need to invest our time, knowledge and resources in ensuring that girls remain in school;” he said.

“Just when girls should be in school and imagining the possibilities ahead, too many are held back from pursuing their ambitions by social and cultural traps. While a boy’s options and opportunities tend to



The Youth and Sports Ministry official further called for the engagement of traditional and religious leaders in ending teenage pregnancy and harmful traditional practices in Liberia.

In remarks, Youth and Sports Minister Saah N’tow, said investing in young people requires the participation of all including community members. “Teenage girls must be given the opportunity by family and society to grow;” he said.

expand when he becomes an adolescent, those of a girl too often shrink.” Mr. Kamaluddeen added.

He regretted that teenage girls in Liberia remain vulnerable to sexual assaults and forced marriage which make them less likely than teenage boys to finish secondary school; if they ever had the chance to start.

A member of the Liberian Parliament, Representative Larry Younquoi who also spoke at the occasion, stressed the need for continuous partnership to ensure that issues affecting the wellbeing of women and



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### World Population Day 2016 Cont'd

girls are properly addressed.

Representative Younquoi pledged his commitment to supporting all efforts geared at policy formulation and enactment of laws that would encourage



*Representative Larry Younquoi*

the empowerment of young people; especially adolescent and teenage girls in Liberia.

The Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Mrs. Julia Duncan-Cassel said investment



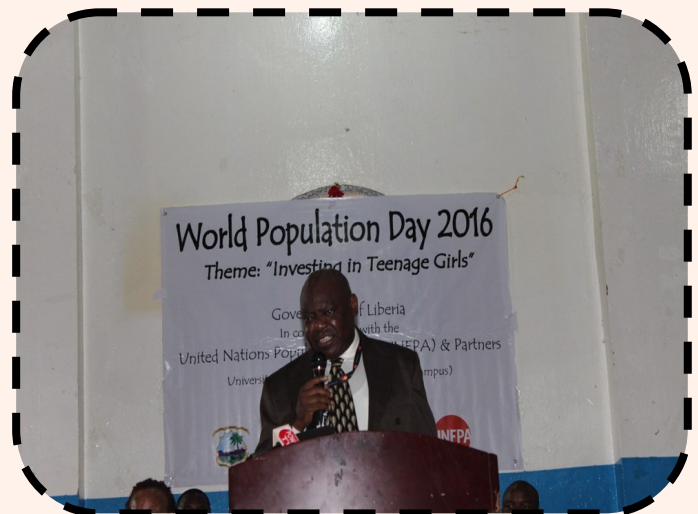
*Minister Julia Duncan Cassell*

in young people must prioritize the girl child. "While we must focus on both the boys and girls in our investment, we should however place more emphasis on girls because they have been left far behind. There is a need to bring them on par with their boy counterparts." She said.

Ms. Duncan-Cassel said the Government of Liberia would continue to ensure the development of policies and enactment of laws that would guide against vices and practices that are harmful to the growth and development of the girl child and women in general. "The government is working to ensure that no girl child is left behind;" she added.

For UNFPA-Liberia Country Representative said there was a need to prioritize the education and empowerment of teenage girls in the country.

Dr. Oluremi Sogunro said so much emphasis has been placed on boys thus making the girls to be lagging behind in terms of education and empowerment.



*UNFPA Liberia Country Representative  
Dr. Oluremi Sogunro*

"If we say we want to invest in girls' education, we must do it...they are the pillars of the nation... when you educate a girl child, you educate a whole nation, therefore, we must do all we can to invest in them," Dr. Sogunro said.

He called for the full implementation of policies and laws that promote the education and development of the 'Liberian Girl Child'.



## Liberia Update

### UNFPA, MoH and Dignity Liberia Re-affirm Commitment to end Fistula in Liberia

The partnership to end obstetric fistula in Liberia has continued to grow day by day. Led by the Liberia Fistula Project of the Ministry of Health which was launched in 2008 by the Government of Liberia in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the campaign has been supported by partners including US-based philanthropic organization, Dignity Liberia.

Dignity Liberia Executive Director Kathi Gutierrez said that her agency would continue to support the end fistula campaign until there was no more obstetric fistula case in the country. According to Ms. Gutierrez her organization was working on arrangement for the construction of maternity waiting homes in Liberia as part of its support to the end fistula campaign.



During a recent visit to Liberia, the Ministry of Health, UNFPA and Dignity Liberia reaffirmed their commitment to ensure that fistula is eliminated in the country.

“We are also concerned about those women and girls whose fistulae cannot be repaired. We want to help to establish them in a community where they will feel wanted and loved;” she said.

For his part, the Director of Family Health, Dr. Joseph Kerkula, cited early marriage, teenage pregnancy and limited access to health facilities as some of factors promoting maternal and newborn deaths in Liberia.

Dr. Kerkula praised Dignity Liberia for their presence and support to efforts to end obstetric fistula in Liberia.



**Ms. Kathi Gutierrez**



## Liberia Update

### MOH and Partners adopt New Family Planning Strategy to Respond to High Unintended Pregnancy and Maternal Deaths in Liberia

The Ministry of Health and partners have revised and adopted a policy to guide service delivery in the area of family planning in Liberia.

This will ensure increase access to the use of family planning services within all the 15 counties.

#### Key Priorities

- ◇ *Expansion of adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) programmes and ensure provision of youth-friendly services to reduce high adolescent birth rates;*
- ◇ *Effective use of community health programmes to scale up community based distribution of family planning commodities in a sustainable manner;*
- ◇ *Expanded distribution of condoms in both private and public health sector;*
- ◇ *Active collaboration with the private sector to provide family planning services;*
- ◇ *Increase access to family planning services by persons of disability and most at populations;*
- ◇ *Increase access to long-acting and permanent family planning strategies;*

The National Family Planning Strategy 2017-2021 builds on the 2010-2014 policy and responds to Liberia's challenges in addressing unintended pregnancy and reduction in maternal deaths.

The strategic document, which is supported by UNFPA, builds on lessons from the implementation of the earlier strategy; especially the performance of the Ministry of Health and partners in addressing the high unmet need for family planning, and the increase in adolescent/teenage pregnancy in the country.

It seeks to support and improve the supply chain of family planning commodities across all management and service delivery points through regular distribution of reproductive health commodities; strengthen the collaboration and coordination of community health structures and health facilities at all levels.

It will also improve private sector involvement in family planning service delivery through regular collaboration or coordination and integrated data collection as well as reporting, among other things.

Though the 2013 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) reported an increase of nineteen percent (11 percent from 2007 to 19 percent) in the use of modern family planning methods over the years, those using these services represent less than a quarter of the general population with knowledge of the benefit of family planning. This is an indication that unmet needs for family planning is still high (31 percent). Additionally, the rates of modern family planning use vary by geographic location. Notably, only 20 percent of currently married women who want to use modern family planning methods in Gbarpolu, Maryland, Montserrado, River Cess, River Gee and Sinoe and under 10 percent in Grand Bassa, Lofa, and Nimba.





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### *Liberia Fistula Program Graduates 35 Survivors at an 'Emotional ceremony'*

Since 2008, the Liberia Fistula Project at the Ministry of Health with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has continued to work towards the total elimination of obstetric fistula in Liberia while at the same ensuring that women and girls already affected by the condition receive free treatment, skills training and social reintegration packages. Through this intervention, more than 1500 of these women and girls have been treated, with about 350 receiving skills training and social reintegration packages.

Some of the graduates could not hide their emotions; and burst in tears as they sang a special chorus explaining the pains, denials, stigma and embarrassments they endured prior to the surgeries and rehabilitation. They were neglected by friends, spouses and family members.

Platform guests and others in the audience and in the audience could also be seen sobbing or fighting to hold back the tears as survivors emotionally sang the lines.



Obstetric fistula is a condition that normally arises from complications during child birth; leading victims to abnormally discharge bodily wastes including urine and/or feces.

On August 22, the Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center at Phebe Hospital, Bong County graduated 35 survivors from its skills training program.

“Lack of funding and the Ebola crisis have slowed our activities,” said Dr. John Mulbah, Fistula Project Coordinator, when he provided an overview of the 2016 program.

However, Dr. Mulbah lauded Zonta International and its membership for their continuous support to the Liberia Fistula Project.



## Liberia Update

### *Liberia Fistula Program Graduates 35 Survivors Cont'd*

Mrs. Draper spoke of a backlog of cases around the country in dire need of surgery and rehabilitation, but regrettably noted that most of them may not be admitted due to limited capacity.

“At the moment the program has only 30 beds, so we cannot take in more than that number despite the numerous calls we receive from around the country from women needing surgery and rehabilitation” she said.

The program’s lead trainer then made a passionate plea to former Health and Social Welfare Minister Dr. Walter Gwenigale under whose administration the program was conceived and birthed, to intercede on their behalf so as to attract more support. Dr. Gwenigale positively responded. He said though



*Former Health Minister Dr. Walter Gwenigale*

he was no longer in authority; he would help the project seek support for additional beds based on the persistent pleas. He made a cash donation of USD 200.00 to the project to be used toward the purchase of additional beds.

He then pleaded with graduates and the audience to serve as goodwill ambassadors in wooing more support to the project, adding, “we look forward today to seeing a fistula free Liberia.”

Also speaking, Assistant Health Minister and Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr. Sampson Azoaquoi thanked the Phebe Hospital for its involvement in

the Fistula Project, indicating that the condition affecting child bearing mothers strongly showed that something was wrong with the country’s health system.



*Assistant Health Minister Dr. Sampson Azoaquoi*

Dr. Azoaquoi lamented the increasing incidence of maternal deaths in Liberia which currently stands at 1072 per 100,000 live births.

According to him, most health care centers around the country are not manned by trained practitioners, a problem he said health authorities have gone to the drawing board to address.

The keynote address was delivered by the Chief of Medical Staff at the Phebe Hospital Dr. Kormassah Tennih, who noted that conflict between entrenched traditional practices and childbearing, which she said sometimes lead to women in labor pains running into complications during deliveries.

She named one as the belief in many cultural settings that attending to women in labor pains is purely a female business. “This often prevents women in labor pains from seeking early medical attention,” Dr. Tennih added.

The UNFPA Fistula Focal Person, Mrs. Esther Lincoln, also charged survivors to help educate other women and prevent them from passing through the terrible experience they (survivors) have endured.



# Liberia Update

## GoL, UNFPA and Implementing Partners hold 3rd Quarter Programme Review Meeting -In Pictures



*Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services and Chairman of the Liberia Population Council, Dr. T. Edward Liberty Opens the Meeting in Kakata, Margibi County*



*Ministry of Health, Family Health Division Director, Dr. Joseph Kerkula gives progress report on programme implementation under the Women Reproductive Health cluster*



*Deputy Minister for Youth Services, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Mr. Lance Gbagonyon gives progress report on programme implementation under the adolescent and youth cluster*



## Liberia Update

A group of adolescents paid visited UNFPA main office in Monrovia to acquaint themselves with the mandate of the organization.

The visit was organized by Messengers of Peace (MOP)-Liberia as part of its Peace Summer Camp for young people.



*Messengers of Peace Executive Director, Miss Gwendolyn Myers directs the interaction between UNFPA and members of the Peace Summer Camp 2016*



*Key inquiries sought by the youths include the benefits and effects of family planning; and sexual and reproductive health information and services available to Liberian youth, among others.*

