

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTHS GUARANTEE NATION'S SECURITY/STABILITY:

One of the cardinal challenges Liberia faces presently is unemployment, especially amongst the Country's youths. The compounding of this problem stem from the external displacement of thousands of Liberian youths who were exiled in the West African sub-region and other parts of the world, who have returned to their home-land and are currently unemployed. Some of these youths have skills but cannot get immediate employment due to the limited job opportunities available back home. There are few international investors who have invested substantially in Liberia but due to the current severe economic problem faced by the world including Liberia, the ripple effect cannot be felt right away.

Meantime, the Unity Party Government led by Her Excellency, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is striving to face these challenges by the introduction of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). Through this mechanism, the Liberian Government through the Labor Ministry and its international partners has designed a strategy whereby short, medium and long term employment opportunities are being introduced to reduce the problem of unemployment in the country. The short term employment runs between three and six months while the medium term goes for nine to twelve months. For permanent employment, which is the long term, the Liberian Government is finding it difficult to secure this sort of employment for most of the youths. However, the Government continues to encourage more investors to come to Liberia by instituting reforms within the judicial system and the rule of law for investors' protection. When there is an increase in the number of investors, certainly there will be the creation of more jobs for the Country's youths.

The returnee population which comprises mostly youths will surely benefit when the economy of Liberia starts to show signs of improvement. Hence, the minds of the youths will not be idle because they will be engaged in income generating activities such as jobs security for their livelihood thus ensuring economic stability and national security.



Returnees undergoing training in Cosmetology @ the New Liberian Women Training Center, Bassa Town New Georgia Estate



Returnees undergoing training in Interior Design @ the New Liberian Women Training Center, Bassa Town New Georgia Estate

With reference to the role of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission in the reintegration of returnees, the Commission has established what is

referred to as the Refugee/Returnee Employment Referral Services program. Through this program, the Commission links skilled returnees to institutions for possible employment opportunities. Since its establishment, the referral program has made some gains. For instance, some of the skilled returnees have been linked to entities that have gainfully employed them. Nevertheless, the LRRRC is still facing the challenge of linking other returnees who are yet to be absorbed by job market due to unfavorable economic situation in Liberia.

The LRRRC is also engaged in soliciting funds in the form of loans and grants for both the skilled/unskilled and vulnerable people to assist them in successfully reintegrating into their communities. Additionally, there is need to train the unskilled returnees in vocations that will enable them get employment or become self-employed. The Commission believes that if assistance is provided to this cause, it will ultimately bring relief to this particular group of people.

Another area of interest to the LRRRC is identifying sources of funding for scholarship for deserving returnee students for primary, secondary and higher education. Most returnee students parents cannot afford to educate their children due to lack of employment and other sources of income generation for the family. There is an urgent need to assist both returnee students and community dwellers who are in need of an education. The LRRRC is also soliciting funding for the construction of shelters for vulnerable people including single mothers, the handicapped and the aged.

In a related development, in recent times, the Young Women Christian Association of Liberia (YWCA) in its strive to provide skills training for unskilled ex-combatants in Liberia, on Friday, 29 May 2009, graduated about 60 ex-combatants after completing a nine-month skills training program in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. The ex-combatants were trained in Metal-works, Tailoring and Auto Mechanics. One concern that was expressed by most of the ex-combatants after their graduation was the challenge they face in securing job opportunities after their training. Others appeal for tool-kits to help them start in groups, since there limited employment opportunities. There is an urgent need to cater to this particular group of people because of the frugidity of their situation.

Meanwhile, the ex-combatants have expressed thanks and appreciation to the YWCA for the opportunity afforded them to gain skills in Metal-works, Tailoring and Auto-mechanics, which they described as an opportunity that will go a long way in sustaining themselves.