



## SUCCESS STORY

### Mano River Youth: The Future Has Arrived

**Young people set an example for regional leaders**



President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf arrives to officially open the MRU Youth Parliament in Monrovia.

USAID/OTI's BRDG-Liberia program (or the Building Recovery and Reform through Democratic Governance program) began in September 2006 in order to support the political transition prompted by the free and fair election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected female head of state in Africa.

This new program approach will help further three specific political objectives:

- Assist the Government of Liberia and other key actors to improve capacity, with an emphasis on communication systems;
- Assist the Government of Liberia and other key actors to mount effective political responses to high-visibility issues;
- Support regional activities aimed at strengthening the Mano River Union.

The USAID Mission in Liberia, USAID's Africa Bureau, and the Office of Democracy and Governance are key players in the coordination of the BRDG program.

USAID/OTI/LIBERIA

**August 2007** – The Mano River Union Youth Parliament (MRUYP) is a subregional network of young people within the Mano River Basin (which comprises areas of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea) that advocates for peace, human rights, and the development of young people and their communities. The MRUYP was launched during a seminar on peace building and conflict resolution held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in August 2003 that included a representative from each of the MRU member countries. The MRUYP was formed in response to the marginalization of young people in the policy formulation and decision-making processes of their countries' governments.

Since last spring, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has provided support to the MRUYP in three phases. In the first phase, the program provided office equipment and supplies to MRUYP's Liberian Chapter. During this phase, OTI also helped organize an election that was held as part of the fifth General Assembly of the Federation of Liberian Youth in Gbarnga, Bong County, in May. The election seated 30 youth representatives, 2 from each of Liberia's 15 counties. During the second phase, OTI supported a Liberian Youth Parliament session -- including a mock assembly of elected parliamentarians -- with a theme of "Enhancing Youth Leadership in Liberia." During the five-day event in July, the participants developed a set of clear, concrete, and comprehensive statutes for the MRUYP's Liberian Chapter. In August 2007, OTI's third phase of support helped host the five-day MRUYP Second Regional Session at the University of Liberia. The theme of the session was "Youth: Strategic Partners for Peace, Security and Poverty Reduction in the MRU," and it brought together 36 youth participants from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea (12 per country). President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf served as keynote speaker at the opening program and Vice President Joseph Boakai closed the session.

In this region that has endured and continues to experience conflicts, few efforts have been made to provide roles for youth leaders. These young people represent not only a tremendous resource in post-conflict situations but also can be key actors in the development process and, ultimately, agents of social transformation. The MRUYP intends to serve as a catalyst for the reawakening of the MRU, which has been dormant since the conflict began in the region in the early nineties.

