



2021
**ANNUAL
REPORT**

LIBERIA

ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	community-based organization
CSC	County Security Council
CSO	civil society organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
EVAWG	ending violence against women and girls
FGM	female genital mutation
FPIC	Free prior and informed consent principles
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
GRPB	gender-responsive planning, policy and budgeting
HP	harmful practice
MGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
NAP WPS	National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
NEC	National Elections Committee
OHCHR	Office of the High Commission for Human Rights
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund,
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality Women Empowerment
VAWiE(/P)	violence against women in elections (/politics)
VAWG	violence against women and girls
VSLA	village savings and loan association
WDC	Women Digital Centres
WPPL	women's political participation and leadership
WPS	women, peace and security and humanitarian actions

INTRODUCTION



UN Women Liberia Country Representative,
Comfort Lamptey

- Women’s political participation, leadership and gender-sensitive governance systems
- Women’s economic empowerment
- Ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG)
- Women, peace and security and humanitarian actions (WPSHA)

Through these pillars, UN Women works to support the Government of Liberia to realize its international commitments to advance the rights of women and girls.

Despite operational setbacks stemming from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the UN Women country office recorded some gains in rolling out programme interventions to promote gender equality and empowerment of women in Liberia. Notable achievements included the development of the first Country Gender Equality Profile by the MGCSP, with technical and financial support from the European Union, Sweden, the African Development Bank and United Nations partner agencies.²

The Country Gender Equality Profile is an important guide, and presents analysis of the existing state of women’s empowerment and gender equality in Liberia as measured against international norms and standards, including

UN Women has worked strategically in Liberia since 2004. The organization works closely with the Government of Liberia through several line ministries, principal among which is the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), as well other key government agencies and Departments.¹ UN Women also collaborates with development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), women’s groups and other United Nations agencies to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE). In line with its global mandate, the work of UN Women Liberia is built around four key pillars, which address the most pressing gender equality concerns for women and girls. These pillars are:

the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, while accounting for the country’s existing legislation and policies.³

To enhance women’s leadership and political participation, an obligatory 30 per cent gender quota on candidate nominations was reinserted into Section 4.5 of the Act to amend sections of the *New Elections Law (1986)* of the Republic of Liberia. This followed multi-stakeholder advocacy engagements – at both subnational and national levels – supported by UN Women. Key engagement activities such as mock parliament sessions, Women’s Legislative Caucus lobby meetings with male lawmakers in the lower house, advocacy meetings with National Elections Commission gender sections, African Women Leaders Network and wider women networks were instrumental in reinstating the 30 per cent gender quota in the electoral law reform bill.

UN Women worked with Sister Aid Liberia to set up a leadership clinic for women candidates in Liberia. The clinic offered tailor-made support on campaign management, messaging and social mobilization for women candidates. Following the clinic, the number of women lawmakers has increased in both upper and lower houses. Approximately 65 women aspirants and campaign teams benefited from the leadership clinic, and from grass-roots mobilization on

1 UN Women also has ongoing partnerships with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning and the ministries of Justice, National Defense, Internal Affairs, Agriculture, Information, Commerce and Industry, and Labour.

2 The Country Gender Equality Profile drew support from UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, OHCHR and UNFPA.

3 <https://datapopalliance.org/publications/country-gender-equality-profile-for-liberia/>



Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Williametta Saydee-Tarr.

the prevention of and response to violence against women in elections (VAWiE).

To promote GEWE, UN Women Liberia educated rural women smallholder farmers about land rights and equal access to – and ownership of – land, thereby enabling them to invest in climate-smart agriculture and agribusiness development. Furthermore, UN Women adapted innovative means of providing extension and advisory services to rural women via social media; specifically, WhatsApp. Social media is being used by UN Women to deploy knowledge products and lessons to over 800 women and youth farmers in many farming cooperatives.

Other women's economic empowerment initiatives – such as Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) and adult literacy, numeracy, and business skills programmes – are helping to unlock the potential of rural women and increase their access to sustainable financial services. Rural women also benefited from sustainable and renewable energy projects through UN Women's partnership with We Care Solar on the use of its solar suitcases. The suitcases provide electricity to over 700 women learners participating in UN Women Liberia's funded literacy and numeracy skills classes in Lofa, Bong and Nimba counties.

Through a partnership with Orange Liberia, UN Women Liberia enhanced the promotion of decent work and created employment opportunities for women as mobile money agents. These women are bringing financial services to places that otherwise lack them.

UN Women further strengthened collaboration with the Government of Liberia and partner organizations to

provide the support necessary to eliminate gender-based violence and to ensure that the needs of women and girls in Liberia are not left behind. Through the European Union and United Nations Spotlight Initiative, construction of two vocational training and heritage centres – in Sonkay Town, Montserrado County and Tienne, Grand Cape Mount County – was completed. The vocational and heritage centres will serve as dedicated learning centres where communities and traditional practitioners of female genital mutilation (FGM) can learn new skills to enable them to get alternative sources of income. The centres will be handed over in 2022. Two other vocational and heritage centres are under construction – in Nimba and Lofa counties – with support from the Spotlight Initiative.

To facilitate timely reporting of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases, 24-hour call centres were established and became operational during the reporting period. The MGCSP will conduct a nationwide awareness-raising of the services being provided at the call centres in 2022.

Increased advocacy on conflict prevention and response, in relation to incidents of political, domestic and personal violence, was also supported during the reporting period through interventions of women peace brigades with funding from the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF).

UN Women also provided technical support to government and security sector institutions – notably the Ministry of National Defense, the Armed Forces of Liberia, the Ministry of Justice and the Liberia National Fire and Rescue Service – to launch gender policies and five-year implementation plans. Furthermore, gender and social inclusion departments were established and launched by the Ministry of National Defense, the Armed Forces of Liberia, and the Liberia National Fire and Rescue Service.

We commend the excellent partnership with the Government of Liberia particularly the MGCSP; Ministry of Finance and Development Planning; Ministry of Internal Affairs; CSOs; women's groups; traditional leaders; implementing partners and our beneficiaries. We thank all our donors, including the Embassies of Canada, Ireland and Sweden, the European Union, and the Peacebuilding Fund, for their unwavering support. Through the support of our donors, the lives of women and girls in Liberia are being transformed tremendously.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, LEADERSHIP AND GENDER SENSITIVE GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

*Hon. Botoe Kanneh, Senator
for Gbarpolu county*





Participants at a mock Parliament session in Liberia

INTRODUCTION

The women's political participation and leadership pillar is informed by the UN Women Global Flagship Programme Initiative theory of change on WPPL which reads: If (1) electoral frameworks and arrangements promote gender balance in elections; if (2) a cadre of interested, diverse and capable women political leaders is formed; if (3) women are perceived as equally legitimate political leaders as men in society; and if (4) women are promoted as leaders in gender-sensitive political institutions, then (5) women will be politically empowered and realize their rights, because (6) women will have political agency and will lead in decision-making. This theory of change focuses on four key domains of change: informal individual change (building capacities, raising consciousness); formal individual change (improving access to resources including information, training, media); informal systemic change (removal of discriminatory norms and practices); and formal systemic change (redesigning and using domestic legal and institutional frameworks).

RESULTS REALIZED

Good progress was made in 2021 towards the adoption of two legal frameworks that promote gender balance in elections and decision-making bodies, specifically Section 4.5 of *An Act to Amend Certain Sections of the New Elections Law (1986)* (submitted to committee room in 2020 but only to plenary in January 2022), as well as a protocol between the National Elections Commission (NEC)

and the registered political parties to address violence against women in elections and/or politics (VAWiE/P). UN Women contributed to increased awareness and acceptance of these proposed reforms through advocacy with lawmakers, including those on the Elections and Inauguration Committee, which is reviewing the electoral reform bill. The programme also



Women Political Empowerment and Leadership Clinic, October 2021

strengthened the advocacy capacity of the Women’s Legislative Caucus and NEC, and supported MGCSP to carry out advocacy on Section 4.5 of the bill, which calls for a mandatory 30 per cent gender quota on candidate listings. Furthermore, support was provided to women’s rights organizations and networks to provide moral, legal and technical support to female candidates, which contributed to an increase of two women in the legislature, one in the Senate and one in the House of Representatives. This increase in the number of women – particularly of women elected as a result of the support of other women – is likely to pave the passage of gender-responsive legal frameworks in the future.

Some progress was made to strengthen the NEC gender section through technical advice and awareness-raising of the VAWiE/P protocol.

Advocacy for gender-sensitive electoral reform was also strengthened. Despite some delays in implementation, by the end of the year technical assistance had been provided in preparation for internal training on gender mainstreaming in elections, to be led by the NEC in early 2022.

The NEC engaged stakeholders in Margibi, Bassa, and Bong counties, and there was participation from most other counties on the importance of preventing and responding to VAWiE/P.

Support was provided to women’s groups, particularly the African Women Leaders’ Network, to deal with electoral disputes involving senatorial candidates, Edith Gongloe Weh and Botoe Kanneh. Support was also provided for legal issues involving the two female candidates in the November by-elections; however, these did not amount to electoral disputes.

Considerable progress was made on strengthening women’s capacity and promoting

positive perceptions of women leaders during the November 2021 by-elections, with partners, Women's NGO Secretariat, Organization for Women and Children, and Sister Aid Liberia engaging in a series of advocacy meetings during the by-elections to persuade women's groups and networks to support the female candidates in Bomi and Nimba counties. With the support of UN Women, MGCSP engaged women's advocates through mock parliament sessions. In addition, UN Women organized a policy dialogue with 32 representatives of women's groups and networks, MGCSP and NEC.

At least 150 young women, drawn from all 15 counties, enrolled in the Young Women Political Leadership and Mentorship Program. A National Young Women Political Council was established and launched as part of strengthening their leadership skills and competencies.

The capacities of 28 national legislators, including 8 elected women and 20 male lawmakers – mainly members of the Elections and Inauguration Committee, Good Governance Committee, Judiciary Committee, and Gender Committee – were increased. This involved South–South exchange with an international expert from Sierra Leone. Trainings focused on persuasive communications, and gender-sensitive legislation, particularly the gender quota contained within the electoral reform bill. More work is needed to transform the exclusionary norms and practices and engender genuine commitment to these reforms in a male-dominated legislature.

Technical and financial assistance was provided to the Women's Legislative Caucus to hold public hearings on Section 4.5 of the new elections law, to engage with their constituencies, and to persuade their female counterparts and male colleagues to support women's political participation. This included communication tools and arguments in favour of gender-sensitive constitutional reform and the legal and constitutional basis for the 30 per cent gender quota. The Women's Legislative Caucus subsequently organized a retreat to lobby their male colleagues in the House of Representatives to accept the 30 per cent enforceable gender quota. These activities were aimed at strengthening advocacy capacity and engendering political will for temporary special measures for women's participation, and culminated in the passage of the electoral reform bill in the Lower House.

Thirty women from political parties – including leaders of women's wings, two female candidates in the by-elections and approximately 20 of their core campaign team members, 45 women leaders in civil society, 32 peace hut women leaders and 33 rural women leaders – were trained, and given technical support on leadership and public speaking, with emphasis on persuasive communication for women's political participation, constituency engagement and alliance building. This work will be scaled up in 2022, towards increasing women's participation in the 2023 general election.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- Launch of a political leadership school that contributed to the election of the female representative candidate in Bomi County (Honourable Lansannah) in the 2021 by-elections.
- The obligatory 30 per cent gender quota reinserted into Section 4.5 of *An Act to Amend Certain Sections of the New Elections Law (1986)* of the Republic of Liberia.
- Establishment of the international women's political participation coordination mechanism, which led to enhanced coordination and strategic joint advocacy on WPPL priorities among international and national partners.
- Enhanced partnership and positioning of the MGSCP to prioritize WPPL as part of their gender-coordination mandate, including conducting mock parliament advocacy activities to raise awareness for an obligatory 30 per cent gender quota, and development of a database of women's competencies.



Candidate Finda Lasannah in Bomi County, in north western Liberia during the by-elections in November 2021

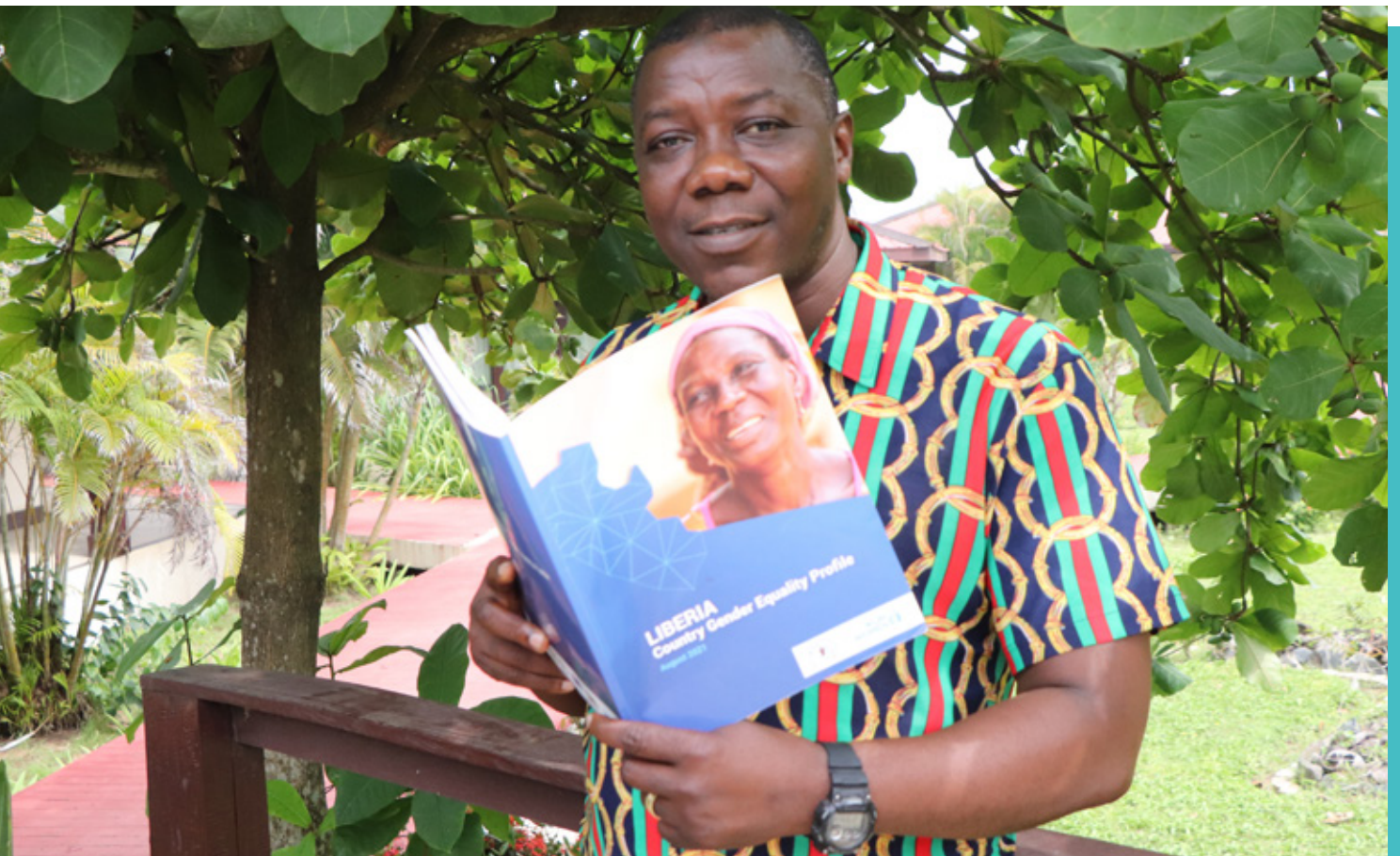


Participants at a mock Parliament session in Liberia

LIST KEY FACTS AND FIGURES FOR 2021

- The regional average for the fraction of women in national parliaments in West Africa is 16.3 per cent, while in Central Africa it is 22.5 per cent.⁸ In Liberia, women make up 10.7 per cent of the members of the national legislature (11 of 103 seats). This is a significant problem, because women and girls make up approximately 50 per cent of the population. In 2021, one additional female senator and one additional representative were elected. Women are also very underrepresented in local government. Although updated statistics are not available for 2021, just 4–6 per cent of local leaders are thought to be women.

⁸ IPU Parline. March 2022. Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments. <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>



Launch of the country gender equality profile

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PLANNING AND BUDGETING

Gender-responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB) brings together two aspects that are not commonly associated, gender equality and public financial management initiatives, and seeks to improve the results of budgets in general and to advance GEWE. Gender-responsive budgeting focuses on key economic and social issues that are often overlooked or obscured in conventional budget and policy analysis and decision-making.

RESULTS REALIZED

Following a capacity-building session on gender analysis of the national budget for the 2021 financial year, 18 lawmakers from the budget committee of the gender and women legislative caucus are now knowledgeable about gender budget analysis.

Although the issues of gender are well highlighted

in the national development plan, the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development, the Revised National Gender Policy, the Girls Education Policy Inclusive Education Policy, the National Health Policy and Plan, and the GRPB Policy, gender-disaggregated allocations for specific programmes and plans are not specified in the budget.

UN Women in close consultation with the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection and with technical and financial support from the European Union, Sweden, the African Development Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, OHCHR and UNFPA developed the Country Gender Equality Profile for Liberia. The Country Gender Equality Profile provides a comprehensive gender analysis of the situation of women and men in the country.

Gender inequality and the marginalization of women in Liberia are perpetuated by sociocultural norms, values and perceptions that support male dominance and the subordination of women. Women and men, girls and boys, have been ascribed different roles and positions in society, which often limits women's participation in the

socioeconomic and political spheres. This has caused women to face many obstacles such as poor access to justice, rape, domestic violence and other forms of SGBV, teenage pregnancy, FGM, child marriage, limited access to finance and markets, and low representation of women in leadership and governance. These inequalities have hindered land rights and ownership, access to and control of resources, and gender-responsive economic growth and development.

The MGCSP developed and presented a strategic plan and costed annual workplan (2021–2023) to partners and stakeholders on 20 September 2021. UN Women provided technical and financial support in developing a framework that would guide the Ministry's strategic direction in the next two years.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- Gender budget analysis training was provided to 18 lawmakers from the budget committee of the gender and women legislative caucus.
- A Country Gender Equality Profile was developed; it demonstrates the status of men and women in Liberia.
- A strategic plan and costed annual workplan (2021–2023) were developed.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Rural Women Farmer from Bellemu, Bong County displays her smartphone showing her use of the Buy from Women digital platform that connects users to buyers. Photo Credit @Michael Peewu

INTRODUCTION

The women's economic empowerment pillar has been working closely with key stakeholders and partners from government, civil society and grass-roots women's groups to change the lives and livelihoods of women and girls in Liberia. The interventions are aligned with UN Women's Global Flagship initiative and projects focused in breadbasket counties, namely Lofa, Bong, Nimba and Margibi and Grand Bassa. In addition, the initiatives focused on enabling rural women and women entrepreneurs to be engaged more strongly as leaders and participants in institutions, policies and programmes that pertain to them; and ensuring a gender-responsive policy environment for the economic and social empowerment of women and girls.

RESULTS REALIZED

A comprehensive survey report on key aspects of land registration and cadastral legislation was developed with technical support from the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services and in collaboration with the Liberia Land Authority through its gender unit.

Over 700 rural women smallholder farmers from Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Margibi, and Grand Bassa counties have increased their knowledge of, and ability to act on, their rights around agriculture, land management and other natural resources. In addition, rural women beneficiaries have gained equal access to, and ownership of, land for investing in climate-smart agriculture and agribusiness development. All these achievements were realized through UN Women strategic outreach and awareness methods (for example, literacy classes and community radios).

Within farming communities in Liberia, women have had inadequate access to agricultural extension and advisory services. This has further reduced their opportunities to learn about coping strategies and climate-smart agriculture. To mitigate this, UN Women has adapted innovative means of providing extension and advisory services by using social media; specifically, WhatsApp. This social media platform is being used by UN Women to deploy knowledge products and lessons to more than 800 women and youth farmers through various farming cooperatives. The information and methodology are both appreciated, and higher productivity – which

increased women farmers' income – was reported. In addition, County Agriculture Coordinators and District Agriculture Officers from the Ministry of Agriculture have been supported to provide advisory services to women farmers.

The UN Women adult literacy, numeracy, and business skills programme, in partnership with the National adult Education Association of Liberia, has achieved significant success. For example, the provision of basic literacy, numeracy and business skills classes for rural women is building their self-confidence and unleashing their potential.

Over 800 women smallholder farmers received seeds, tools and machinery. The provision of agricultural inputs has resulted in increased yields of produce, as shown by improved food and nutrition security at the levels of the household and community.

UN Women, in collaboration with Orange Liberia, created employment opportunities for over 70 UN Women beneficiaries as Orange Money Agents (providing mobile money). Efforts here have promoted decent work and strengthened employment opportunities for women as mobile money agents. These women are offering financial services in both United States and Liberian dollars.

Over 17 community-based facilitators and 52 extension officers from the government – including from the Ministry of Agriculture and MGCSP – have been spreading the knowledge and skills needed to use and manage the UN Women Liberia Buy from



A beneficiary of the vocational skills training program demonstrates her tailoring skills. UN Women facilitated the training for rural women in Liberia with funding support from the Embassy of Sweden.

Women digital platform. The platform connects women farmers and cooperatives to information, finance and markets. In addition, over 700 women learners are Orange Money users, as shown by the use and management of their Orange mobile money accounts.

Two community peace huts were transformed into Women's digital centres (WDC) in partnership with the Orange Foundation. These WDCs are actively supporting women's empowerment through providing women peacemakers with access to digital literacy classes, including information and communication technologies. The joint initiative of UN Women and the Orange Foundation pays particular attention to training for women, and girls' schooling. It is helping women find paid employment. In other cases, the WDCs are helping women find jobs, return to work or retrain for a different job.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- Findings and recommendations from UN Women’s study on land registration and cadastral legislation have informed UN Women’s 2022 and 2023 annual workplans in support of the gender-responsive implementation of the Land Rights Act (the new land law) and related activities.
- UN Women promoted innovation for gender equality through using social media applications, and productivity has increased.
- Over 40 VSLAs are providing sustainable rural credit to over 1,000 women smallholder farmers for investing in climate-smart agriculture. These associations are providing financial security and independence for these rural women beneficiaries.
- Education is unleashing women’s potential. For example, women’s market tables are being transformed into profitable businesses. Rural women farmers are saving money as bank and mobile money account holders.
- Over 13 women-based farming cooperatives, totalling over 2,000 members, are benefiting from sustainable and renewable energy through the provision of the We Care Solar suitcases. These suitcases are providing electricity to over 700 women learners attending and participating in UN Women–funded literacy and numeracy skills classes.



A beneficiary of the adult literacy training program demonstrates her writing skills. UN Women facilitated vocational skills training for rural women in Liberia with funding support from the Embassy of Sweden.

IMPACT STORY 1

A SUCCESS STORY OF A RURAL WOMAN GARDENER

Evon Flomo, age 59, from Margibi County, Liberia, says:

“ Before my participation in the JP RWEE⁴, I was struggling in Worhn Town, Margibi County, with no access to storage for preserving my produce, especially for pepper, bitter balls and tomatoes. I had no knowledge or skills in storing nor preserving the produce from my garden. So, most times they would get rotten, and I would lose money and my effort would go in vain.

“ After UN Women and other partners met with us in a meeting in my town, it was agreed that the JP RWEE would consider constructing a storage house and would train us – the women – in different areas like food preservation and the use of machines to process rice and cassava produce. Within three months, the storage house was constructed and equipped. About a month later, I received training in food preservation, which made me better understand how to preserve my perishable produce for selling in the local market. Within two months after receiving this training, I started selling powder pepper and pepper sauce including powder bitter balls and tomatoes.


“ I had the knowledge and skills on preserving my produce, but I had no money. So, I took a loan amounting to LD\$8,000.00 at 10 per cent interest from my local Village Savings and Loans Association, established by the programme, to invest in my garden. After the sale of my produce, I was able to pay back the loan with interest, making it a total of LD\$8,800.00 in payback. I had generated a total of LD\$24,700.00, getting a profit of LD\$15,900.00 from my garden project. I did not need to worry anymore about my produce spoiling. Customers came and bought my produce, and I have been able to get more money, which I am investing in my VSLA for growing the business.

“ Because I now make my own money, I have become more independent and always participate in decision-making in my house and in my community. I now help my husband to pay our children’s school fees, which has helped reduce the burden on the family.”

4 Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women



Rural woman farmer in Passama, Lofa county, Liberia

A woman in traditional Liberian attire, including a yellow and red patterned dress and a white headband, is playing a kpanlogo, a traditional Liberian musical instrument. She is holding the instrument's frame and strings, which are decorated with colorful beads. The background is a solid orange color with faint, circular patterns.

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (EVAWG)

Traditional practitioners from Grand Cape Mount county, Liberia

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations being perpetrated in Liberia. It is the major obstacle to the fulfilment of women's and girls' human rights and to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to leave no one behind. EVAWG is an important and urgent priority for UN Women Liberia, because strong patriarchal social norms remain entrenched, and VAWG remains socially acceptable. In 2021, to address VAWG, two programmes were implemented, the European Union – United Nations Spotlight Initiative and the Women's Peace Humanitarian Funds Initiative.

EUROPEAN UNION – UNITED NATIONS SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE PROGRAMME

The Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative of the United Nations aimed at eliminating all forms of VAWG. In Liberia, the Spotlight Initiative programme, a multi-year and multi-country programme, was launched in 2019. The initiative responds to all forms of VAWG, with a particular focus on domestic and family violence, SGBV,

harmful traditional practices, femicide, trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation. In Liberia, the programme is focused on the prevention of and response to SGBV and elimination of harmful traditional practices, specifically FGM.

RESULTS REALIZED

To address unacceptable social norms and behaviours, the Spotlight Initiative programme meticulously engaged traditional leaders as custodians of culture in various interventions, given their influence and reach. In total, 221 traditional leaders and 108 faith-based leaders (religious leaders) have gained better knowledge and skills on gender-transformative programmes on SGBV, harmful practices (HPs), sexual and reproductive health and rights, and access to legal aid. These trained leaders shared information and awareness on SGBV prevention through peer-to-peer engagements, church and mosque services and outreach programmes, thus reaching many of the communities in their areas.

In total, 300 traditional practitioners have committed to not practice FGM, yet are better

able to take care of their families because of new funding sources. These sources include climate-smart agriculture, small businesses and other literacy skills projects. These traditional practitioners, who are integrated in 12 VSLA groups, have seen their capital grown to LD\$5,173,820, compared with LD\$2,149,775 in 2020. These 300 beneficiaries have reported being financially independent.

Amid COVID19, traditional and religious leaders have continued to play pivotal roles in ensuring that legal cases against perpetrators of VAWG were not compromised⁵ at community levels and that information and awareness-raising about the prevention of VAWG reached the most remote communities in all five Liberia Spotlight Initiative target counties.

5 If the "case is compromised", that means that families of survivor(s) and perpetrator(s) negotiated and agreed upon the financial compensation for the "damage caused". This guarantees that the survivors will not use legal mechanisms to seek justice, and will not legally prosecute the perpetrator.



Construction of the vocational and heritage centre in Grand Cape Mount county

These beneficiaries, including community leaders (religious and traditional), are now agents of change. They are addressing unacceptable social norms, and are involved in establishing community structures that seek to ensure that women and girls are protected, and perpetrators of violence are referred to the police for legal redress.

During the 16 Days of Activism, 184 local-level campaigns were conducted in city centres and communities to raise awareness of incidents of SGBV and the forcing of young women and girls in bush schools to undergo FGM.

During the peak of the third wave of the COVID19 pandemic, key county stakeholders⁶ were engaged in town hall meetings, street theatre performances and open-air programmes about COVID19 safety protocols and VAWG prevention

and response. They received knowledge on the comprehensive prevention strategy to prevent VAWG, learning on the continuum of sexual violence and domestic violence and the referral pathway on SGBV, as well as how to report cases and use various centres for support.

In addition, under the HeForShe Campaign, five male networks with 145 male members have a new-found knowledge of, and commitment to, working as change agents. These men conducted gender-transformative programmes, which included peer-to-peer male engagement on positive social norms, attitudes and behaviours, and promotion of women's and girls' rights. The aim was to ensure transformative change at the individual and systemic level and address gender inequality and injustice, and create opportunities to challenge harmful norms such as the practice of FGM. Also, these male groups and networks promoted increased awareness and concern about SGBV and HP prevention by communicating

⁶ Those include County Gender Coordinators, women and children protection services Officers, health practitioners, religious, traditional and community leaders, and youth groups.

tailored messages to peer groups, families and communities. As a result, most communities have established community structures that enforce guidelines on the treatment of women and girls, and hand perpetrators of violence to the Women and Children Protection Section of the Liberia National Police for prosecution.

The 24/7 service call centre is operational and receiving calls using the 116 toll-free hotline number provided by Liberia Telecommunication Corporation, the national operator providing telephone, Internet, fax and radio services to the Greater Monrovia area. This has helped with timely reporting of cases to relevant institutions, and reduced the chances of compromising SGBV cases at the community level, especially at the peak of COVID19. MGSCP is planning a nationwide awareness of the services that are provided through the call centre in 2022.

Two vocational and heritage centres were completed for use as centres for regular dialogue and skills training on positive traditional practices. Those completed are in Sonkay Town, Montserrado County and Tienne, Grand Cape Mount County. Each of the centres has the capacity to receive at least 1,000 people at time. Centres in Gbanquoi, Nimba and Vezela, Lofa county will be completed in 2022.

In total, 25 CSOs and five CSO Secretariats were given small grants to conduct awareness activities and provide support for survivors of violence – including transportation, feeding, support during legal processes and so on. As a result, more communities are aware of SGBV prevention and the use of the referral pathway. An institutional capacity survey conducted in 2020 showed that 50–60 per cent of CSOs have policy gaps, and as a result 79 CSOs had their capacities strengthened, and developed gender and social inclusion policies and other policies on human resources, finance and procurement.

Results realized: Spotlight – Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund programme

The Spotlight-WPHF Partnership funded eight local and grass-roots, women-led and women’s rights organizations that started implementation in July 2020 and ended on 31 December 2021. They achieved outcomes aligned with Impact Area 6 of the Spotlight Initiative: “Women’s rights groups, autonomous social movements, and relevant civil society organizations, including those representing youth and groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination/ marginalization, more effectively influence and advance progress on GEWE and EVAWG, including SGBV/HP” and Impact Area 5 of the WPHF: “Enhanced safety, security and mental health of women and girls’ and their human rights respected”. The eight projects reached 16,641 direct beneficiaries (female 13,997, male 2,644) and an estimated 1 million indirect beneficiaries, particularly those suffering from abuse and violence, and those with disabilities.

The programme had several important results:

- The project adopted several innovative strategies to disseminate the research findings from 2021. As a result, two new grass-roots Change Agent Women Community groups were established to sustain the advocacy work done by the Platform for Dialogue and Peace.
- Ten women’s rights or women-led beneficiary organizations enhanced their skills as peacebuilders and developed community-driven action plans on women’s economic empowerment and self-awareness to reduce their vulnerability to SGBV. An additional 944 women were reached directly, and there were 4,720 indirect beneficiaries who developed enhanced skills as peacebuilders and reduced their vulnerability to SGBV.
- A total of 150 peace brigades, selected from 15 CSOs, mentored and built the capacity of 5,380 young women in 100 violence-prone communities. Women peace

brigades increased their advocacy work on conflict prevention and response, especially in relation to incidents of political, domestic and personal violence. This was made possible by the training they received on human rights, specifically gender equality and rights for women, and strategies on conflict prevention and self-defence training.

- Knowledge of accountability mechanisms, community score cards and public expenditure tracking was improved at 60 CSOs. With the newly gained knowledge and skills these CSOs tracked seven SGBV cases in targeted communities while the media (radio) reported nine cases. The reported cases were prosecuted to allow justice for the survivors.
- Two Women Peace Huts were constructed and are now being used as permanent spaces for gender actors to provide services and resources for women and girls. In these safe spaces, they can speak freely. The spaces are also used as referral centres for any SGBV cases. The peace huts are coordination and meeting centres for women's groups and coalitions and SGBV prevention committees to continue their work on advocacy. The Women Peace Huts are also used for the women's VSLA meetings.
- Community elders from 21 communities are conducting regular Palava hut meetings⁷ and dialogues in which elders are made more aware of the continuum of SGBV and their much-needed role as the custodians of culture in preventing it. With their increased knowledge and commitment, cases are less likely to be comprised at the community level, something which was prevalent in most communities.
- A total of 100 beneficiaries (76 female, 24 male) from nine grass-root women's

organizations, six community clubs, five community radio stations and seven correspondent reporters, drawn from 20 communities, have enhanced their skills and are using the appropriate accountability mechanisms for advocacy on GEWE and EVAWG, including SGBV and HP. They can now constructively advocate for non-violence and peaceful coexistence, and can assume civil responsibilities in their communities.

- After being recruited from 20 communities, 100 in-and-out-of-school girls between the ages of 13 and 21 were trained and organized into 20 community girls' clubs and are now acting as change agents in the prevention of SGBV and HPs. Seed funding enabled the girls to start income-generating activities (soap making, candle making and weaving), which increased their self-reliance during the reporting year. The profits generated were reinvested in the businesses and were used to create awareness and to follow up on seven SGBV cases.
- Women's groups, traditional leaders, young people and men were brought together in 30 community dialogues about the negative values and practices that previously perpetuated discrimination against women's and girls' rights to own land. Following these dialogues, solutions were identified to support women's rights to own or inherit land and the associated benefits to the society.
- The SavApp is a mobile digital reporting application developed to collect data on SGBV response and prevention and reporting. The SavApp continued to be used in selected communities and 200 direct beneficiaries (117 female, 83 male) were coached, which enhanced the usage of the app and showcased its suitability for documenting SGBV cases. With the app

⁷ The "Palava hut" is an indigenous reconciliatory and non-adversarial process of justice and conflict transformation used to resolve disputes relating to such issues as divorce, land, theft, and occasionally murder and rape by many ethnic groupings in rural Liberia. <https://silo.tips/download/traditional-justice-mechanisms-the-liberian-case>



Rice harvest ceremony in Todee, Montserrat – MGCSP & NACCEL

in place, reporting of cases of SGBV in the counties of focus was made easier and quicker and done according to international standards, including taking into consideration principles of confidentiality. As a result, communities showed an increased level of trust in reporting cases of SGBV, thus breaking the silence and ensuring that survivors received support in a timely manner. This was made possible following a training of trainers undertaken by 10 staff (five female, five male) from Girls for Change and the Foundation for Community Initiatives on data collection and reporting using the SavApp.

Results realized: Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund Emergency Response Window and COVID19

The WPHF COVID19 Emergency Response Window funded three grass-roots women-led and women’s rights organizations during the reporting year. The organizations focused on implementing COVID19 interventions, which commenced in July 2020 and ended on 31 December 2021. They responded to the global pandemic in ways aligned to two primary funding streams:

- Stream 1: “Institutional support for local CSOs working on women’s peace and security and humanitarian issues whose existence might be threatened by the current COVID19 crisis.”

- Stream 2: “Programmatic support to prevent and respond to COVID19 and its gendered dimensions.”

The projects reached 13,453 direct beneficiaries (10,074 female, 3,379 male) and 47,827 indirect beneficiaries. They came from various age groups, and the projects focused on women and girls who had suffered from abuse, violence or the COVID19 economic shock. The project targeted 51 communities and led to the following key results:

- Through the institutional funding, the Disabled Children and Females Empowerment Network (DCFENETWORK) became more operational; it received additional working space and equipment, and could scale up its work on women’s protection during and after COVID 19. Similarly, 13 (six female, seven male) DCFENETWORK staff have improved their skills in technical, managerial and financial management, which has enabled their institution to effectively promote women’s protection against SGBV and human rights violations. The project further collaborated with women’s groups to advance its mission to address issues of SGBV and prevent COVID19 in target communities. As a result of this campaign, DCFENETWORK has expanded its office to two other counties (Grand Bassa and Grand Cape Mount), where they are having more impact.
- As a result of the established CSO and community-based organization (CBO) networks, response and recovery strategies for the COVID19 health crisis were revised and developed by taking into consideration the views of women, youth and persons with disabilities, and with their participation. Collaborations between the CSO and CBO networks and district COVID19 task forces were strengthened to enhance the participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities within these local COVID19 response structures, and increase their full participation in

COVID19 response activities at community level. With the establishment of these coalitions, SGBV cases were monitored and reported to relevant authorities in a timely manner without any fear of victims being marginalized or discriminated against, as was often the case in the past at community level.

- In the spirit of ‘leaving no one behind’ when understanding laws and policies surrounding SGBV, the *Domestic Violence Act 2019* was transcribed into braille. With this advancement, five visually impaired staff (three female, two male) have increased their knowledge about the Act and can use knowledge-sharing to help protect themselves and their communities from domestic violence.
- Disadvantaged women and child survivors of SGBV can more readily obtain justice by receiving free legal services. As a result of institutional support, cumulatively, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia documented 150 disadvantaged women and girl survivors of SGBV in Grand Bassa and Montserrado, increased its outreach and provided free legal services to them. The organization remains relevant because survivors of SGBV continue their contacts with the organization.
- Around 150 households headed by women (some of whom are survivors of SGBV or persons with disabilities) can use social cash support they received during the reporting year to provide for their needs without the need to borrow, which helps them resist the economic shock of COVID19. Moreover, with the psychosocial support, women and girls are better able to address and overcome emotional and mental health challenges and realize their self-worth and dignity. The establishment of 14 CSOs and CBOs increased the ability of women to participate in decision-making in the fight against the COVID19 pandemic.
- In total, 56 civil society actors from 14 CSOs and CBOs have increased their

ability to deal with COVID19; this includes monitoring and reporting cases of SGBV. They can now more effectively engage stakeholders about ending VAWG, and about the meaningful participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in decision-making in the fight against COVID19.

- Psychosocial support has helped 197 individuals (196 females, 1 male) to

enhance their skills to address and overcome emotional and mental health challenges. These beneficiaries have gained their sense of community belonging and have joined community groupings, such as women's rights groups and other relevant community structures that represent individuals who are faced with significant forms of discrimination and marginalization.



A traditional practitioner from Grand Cape Mount County, in western Liberia, Dudu Sambola who is also a beneficiary of the adult literacy program showcases that she can now write.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- The Liberia Spotlight Initiative undertook a midterm assessment, a critical part of the programme, which has greatly helped programme refocus and redesign. Based on the review, the phase two intervention was modified to ensure increased sustainability and government ownership. The initiative has ensured that funding is spread across the various implementing CSOs and women's rights groups, rather than overloading a single organization, and has also informed the development of the phase two workplan and implementation processes.
- Traditional and religious leaders continued to play pivotal roles in ensuring that legal cases against perpetrators of VAWG are not compromised at the community levels, and that information and concern about the prevention of VAWG reached some of the most remote communities in all five Liberia Spotlight Initiative target counties. Most of these traditional, religious and community leaders have participated in capacity-building training to address negative social norms, attitudes and behaviour. The training has included SGBV prevention and referral, and is one of the tasks undertaken by the 50 community action groups that are raising awareness and concern in communities in which violence is common.
- Following receipt of the simplified version of the law, 789 rural women and girls and 89 men have gained enhanced knowledge about the inheritance law in Liberia. This law was simplified and translated into local dialects to make it readily understandable by community members, and was part of the training materials used to educate women and girls about their rights to land and property inheritance.
- An electronic mobile application (MApp), locally called Kobocollect, was developed and used to collect, manage, track and report data on cases of SGBV against women and girls with disabilities during and after the COVID19 pandemic. Piloted in Montserrado County, the MApp is user-friendly for the disabled and is currently being used by staff of DCFENETWORK and other disability support groups in the project target communities. As a result, 75 cases of rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence were reported. This indicates an increase in reporting of SGBV cases by disabled groups, suggesting that the app is helping them not get left behind.

LIST KEY FACTS AND FIGURES FOR 2021

- Two vocational and heritage centres were completed – one in Sonkay Town, Montserrado County and one in Tienne, Grand Cape Mount County – during the reporting period. Two other centres are being constructed in Vezela, Lofa County and Gbanquoi, Nimba County, and should be completed in 2022.
- A total of 1,204 SGBV cases were documented; 871 were cases of rape, 143 were sexual assaults. Most of the survivors were girls aged less than 18 years.
- The skills of 140 gender justice clubs, 80 men champions, key stakeholders and 10 staff have been improved. They are now using the mobile SavApp to capture and report real-time data on SGBV cases in the project-selected counties of Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount and Bomi and communities, leading to an increase in SGBV case reporting (902 cases from May to August 2021).
- Compared to 2020, 150 more women and girls are now able to protect and defend themselves from the immediate threat of violence (for example, from rape, physical harm or threats and attacks using weapons) and are now confident in undertaking peacebuilding events during their regular activities.
- In the reporting period, 606 women received training to improve their skills and knowledge on the prevention of and response to various forms of SGBV and HPs; they are now deployed in communities to track, monitor and report SGBV cases, leading to lower chances of compromising SGBV cases at the community level.
- As the result of 12 established VSLAs, 300 women have access to loans and have developed commitment and buy-in on addressing critical issues (SGBV, denial of land rights, and so on) affecting women and girls, and can mitigate risks in a timely manner.
- An electronic mobile application (MApp) was developed and used to collect, manage, track and report data on cases of SGBV against women and girls with disabilities during and after the COVID19 pandemic.



Traditional practitioners in Liberia have embarked alternative economic livelihood activities to eliminate FGM



IMPACT STORY 2

WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN LIBERIA

“ We [traditional practitioners] used to teach girls how to behave in the presence of older people, plaiting hair and being modest, as part of the Sande Society,” [which includes FGM], explains Kema Dahn, a community leader and former practitioner of FGM in Nimba County in north-eastern Liberia.

“ We are no longer practising FGM because we realized that it is not necessary. We are now focusing on agriculture and business.”

Fifty per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 in Liberia have undergone the harmful practice of FGM, often without their consent. FGM is often performed for financial as well as cultural reasons. Therefore, to reduce the demand for it, the livelihood programme provides climate-smart agriculture and business management training to FGM practitioners, so they have alternative ways of earning an income.

Dahn is one of 300 traditional practitioners who has benefited from the Alternative Economic Livelihood programme, launched in 2019 by UN Women as part of the multi-year European Union – United Nations Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls.

“What will make us leave these traditional things is empowerment to start our own businesses,” says Dahn. “I never knew much about farming. The new skills I have learned in agricultural business development and management provided a great opportunity for me to get another source of income.”

Yatta Fahnbulleh was the owner of one of the largest bush schools in Tienii in north-western Liberia, where she initiated girls into adulthood through a series of rituals, including FGM. She has since closed the bush school, and a new vocational and heritage centre that is part of the livelihood programme has been built on the same land.

“The time has come for me to change after 35 years ... I feel good about the opportunity to learn and to earn regular income outside of the usual thing I have been doing for years,” says Fahnbulleh. “I see the new project as a good opportunity for all the traditional practitioners across Liberia.”

IMPACT STORY 3

SELF-DEFENCE SCARED PERPETRATORS AWAY

“The Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa has impacted our lives and communities through the WPHF-Spotlight sponsored project by providing training and awareness on SGBV. Sangay Kamara and other peace brigades have ensured SGBV within our communities is not permitted in the name of tradition. Since acquiring our training, we have been instrumental in solving the common home’s problems, that are forwarded to our group, which is inspired by a peace brigade.” Jemama Kyne, a peace brigade member from Bolahun, Kolahun district.

Jemama is a peace brigade member who was a victim of physical domestic violence. Her influence as a peace brigade member has stopped her spouse from being an abusive husband, which has in turn inspired others to take the same journey.

“The smile of happiness never ceases if you believe in a change,” says Jemama.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS (WPSHA)



Younger Gayfar, 50, a member of the Konia Peace Hut a centre established to assist rural women with conflict prevention and peace building

INTRODUCTION

The women, peace and security (WPS) pillar aims to promote sustained peace and inclusive and sustainable growth and development through strengthened formal and informal institutions by providing access to effective equitable justice and security services, promoting and protecting human rights, and strengthening social cohesion and reconciliation. The WPS pillar implements programmes to help incorporate gender into national peacebuilding processes and key security institutions. The pillar empowers the national government, through its key line ministries, to implement key legal and policy frameworks to support ongoing peace processes. Through the WPS pillar, UN Women has been supporting community women to set up peace huts to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding and to empower them economically.

RESULTS REALIZED

Women's participation and leadership in land governance strengthened.

Customary land authorities and community members are now participating actively in land governance and dispute resolution through existing and established community structures. Following the establishment of community land development and management committees, women are taking leadership and participatory roles equal with men in decision-making processes about land.

Capacities of Liberian Government institutions enhanced

Government institutions – including the Liberia Land Authority, National Bureau of Concessions, and the Environmental Protection Agency – now understand free prior and informed consent principles (FPIC) and United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights. This has in turn triggered recommendations that voluntary agreements be signed between concessionaires and the communities to enforce FPIC principles and support the communities' claims to benefits deserved from concession companies.

Additionally, county land boards and offices in four counties (Nimba, Sinoe, Maryland and Grand Cape Mount) are now equipped with the tools to support their work. The county land offices

have the equipment and technical know-how and are now supporting in the customary land formalization process.

Gender mainstreaming is progressively being adopted within government agencies

A gender policy for the National Bureau of Concessions was developed, along with a five-year action plan for its implementation. The policy includes strategic priorities to mainstream gender into the organizational structures, systems and processes through coordination and technical assistance to concessions' tripartite partners, leadership and oversight roles, stakeholders' coordination, and concessions-related legal review for concurrence with the land-based investment laws and other social- and gender-responsive laws and policies. A gender mainstreaming strategy was also developed for multi-stakeholder platforms. Additionally, a gender analysis led to the development of a gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan for public procurement and concessions spaces, to be implemented by the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission.

Alternative dispute resolution widely implemented

Alternative dispute resolution is now widely practised within the project communities to resolve conflict among community members and



Beneficiaries of the Peace Hut in Tamba Community, Maryland County

between concessionaires and concession-affected communities. This is evident in Grand Cape Mount County and Nimba County, where joint projects, alongside local and national government, have supported communities to resolve conflicts over land and unmet commitments from concession companies.

Community dialogues

Close to 300,000 people in Liberia are more informed about the rights of women to land following a series of community dialogues that were held in seven counties – namely Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba, Lofa and Maryland – between August and December 2021. The dialogues were physically attended by 895 people (698 females and 197 males), while others listened to the dialogues through community radio stations.

Implementation structures of the National Action Plan strengthened

The Government of Liberia has taken greater strides in advancing the WPS agenda through implementation of its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019–2023. This is also shown by the new government’s efforts to strengthen accountability mechanisms and put in place a structure to support the implementation of the NAP WPS. The government is also trying to mobilize financial resources for the NAP WPS through innovative financing and gender-responsive budgeting.

Gender policies and Departments of Gender and Social Inclusion launched

Security sector institutions continued to build on successes from the previous years by endorsing and launching gender policies and five-year implementation plans, setting the stage for gender to be fully mainstreamed. Additionally, Gender and Social Inclusion departments were established and launched at the Ministry of National Defense/Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the Liberia National Fire and Rescue Service.

A draft gender and human rights–sensitive Legal Aid Act for Liberia developed and validated

This Act will govern all matters related to access to justice and legal aid in criminal, civil and administrative cases for indigent persons, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and other vulnerable and marginalized persons such as women, persons living in remote rural areas, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons and persons that have been adversely affected by the Liberian Civil War.

Armed Forces of Liberia take steps to increase number of women in uniform

To complement the barrier assessment and realize the commitment by AFL to increase women’s participation in the armed forces, AFL conducted a 3-week pre-recruitment training exercise exclusively for women. The exercise was designed to enhance the physical fitness of female recruits and therefore their competitiveness for the recruitment process. AFL expects to recruit 350 Liberians in 2022, with women accounting for at least 60 per cent of the intake, as a direct impact of this pre-recruitment physical training. This will in turn contribute to an increase in the number of women soldiers and officers who are deployed in peacebuilding missions.



Participants at a community dialogue on the rights of women to land and, gender roles and masculinities

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- Women now constitute over 40 per cent of the members of community land management and development committees.
- Gender mainstreaming has been adopted into government institutions including the National Bureau of Concessions, Liberia Land Authority, PPCC, LNFS and MOD/AFL.
- Alternative dispute resolution for land disputes is now common in disputes between community members and between communities and concession companies.
- Concession companies are acknowledging and delivering on their commitments to communities.
- A draft gender and human rights–sensitive Legal Aid Act for Liberia has been developed and validated.
- The implementation structure of the NAP WPS – which includes the National Steering Committee, the Technical Working Group, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Unit, and county task forces and district champions in two counties (Grand Bassa and Nimba) – has been established. This has led to a strong monitoring, reporting and coordination mechanism to strengthen the accountability of the NAP WPS. For example, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Unit has collected all outstanding baselines for the NAP WPS.
- In 2021, the government increased its commitment to the NAP WPS by allocating US\$70,000 to enhance the capacity of the national GRPB coordination unit, and US\$1.2 million to the social development sector; most of the activities are linked to various aspects of the implementation of the NAP WPS.
- State institutions, CSOs and women’s networks have more knowledge on the NAP WPS and its implementation and are advocating for increased budget allocations for the implementation of the NAP WPS.
- Women-led organizations have increased their capacity for shadow treaty reporting and evidence-based research. Through the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), a shadow report has been validated and awaits submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

IMPACT STORY 4

WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN BEARS FRUIT

Adah Johnson*, 56, from Flumpa, Nimba County in north-eastern Liberia is a beneficiary of the continued awareness sessions on the rights of women to land and participation in land governance decision-making processes conducted by a local NGO, Rights and Rice Foundation (RRF), with support from UN Women Liberia.

When Ms. Johnson lost her husband in September 2021, her relatives evicted her from her house and gave her the option to marry her late husband's brother so that she could continue staying at the house. She was not interested in this arrangement. In contrary to this proposed arrangement and in accordance with the *Land Rights Act 2018*, on the demise of a partner or spouse the living spouse and their children have the right to all the property left behind by the deceased.

Although Ms. Johnson had not attended any of the awareness sessions, her friends from the community who had been active participants invited her to one of the sessions so that she could share her experience.

Some community leaders who had benefited from the training on women's land rights and participation in land governance, pleaded with the family and explained to them that under the Land Rights Act, Ms. Johnson has a right to her late husband's property and should not be forced to marry against her will.

According to the Women's Land Rights Act, all community members, including women, have a right to own land. In addition, widows have the right to inherit the land of their deceased spouses as articulated in the inheritance law.

After some negotiations, Ms. Johnson got her farmland back, but she is yet to recover her house. Authorities have intervened and are in discussions with the family to get Ms. Johnson her house back. She is currently living in Kakata, Margibi County with her four children. She sells charcoal and firewood to earn a living.

“ Papay Edwin Zengbay, General Town Chief of Flumpa and others intervened and told them they were wrong. They then gave me the land back but not the house. My husband's people are living in the house now. I felt bad but I don't have money to go to the law and I am powerless, so I left the house to them,” said Ms. Johnson.

According to Ms. Johnson, “It is necessary to keep encouraging women to speak out when oppressed and denied of their rights. Women should also seek advice because they do not have money to go to the law as was in my case.”

RRF has been conducting awareness sessions and trainings on land rights and participation in land governance. “It is an opportunity for community members to get more information and resolve conflicts they may have over lands. We don't go to court on behalf of beneficiaries. We leave it to community elders and the people to resolve conflicts,” says Joseph Ballah, Gender Specialist at RRF.

Empowering women also means empowering men to be champions for women's rights, as seen in this case in which male elders also fought for Ms. Johnson's rights.

Ms. Johnson is one of many women in rural Liberia who were forced to leave their homes when their husbands died, but have been empowered to know more about women's land rights. UN Women is supporting RRF to conduct awareness-raising sessions on women's land rights under the project Sustaining Peace and Reconciliation through Strengthening Land Governance and Dispute Resolution mechanisms, funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

* Name has been changed to protect the identity of the beneficiary.

OPERATIONS

The Operations Unit's main role is to ensure the smooth delivery of programmatic activities. Beyond internal interactions, the Operations Unit works in synergy with other United Nations agencies within the Operations Management Team to enhance harmonized rules and procedures to increase efficiency and save costs.

The Liberia country office Operations Unit comprises the following units:

1. Human Resources
2. Procurement Management
3. Administration and Logistics
4. Finance.

These four units, under the supervision of the international operations manager, are tasked with supporting programme units in the implementation of the office annual workplan. Such support includes the provision of qualified personnel, the procurement of goods and services, the organization of transport, financial control and timely payment of partners.

Human Resources Unit

The Human Resources Unit proactively participated in identifying staffing needs and conducted timely recruitment processes. In 2021, four service contract holders at assistant level, 14 national and 10 international short-term consultants were recruited to support the core staff to speed up the programme delivery. In addition, the 2021 staff learning plan was developed and implemented. It provided opportunities for staff development and learning based on the approved Learning Strategy.

Procurement Management Unit

The Procurement Unit has conducted essential procurement of office equipment, vehicles and furnishings. In terms of office equipment, the focus in 2021 was on the improvement of the

country office IT capacity (laptops and cell phones were provided to all new staff, and obsolete ones were replaced) and on the provision of two new vehicles and five motorbikes to replace the ageing ones that were disposed of through auction.

Administrative and Logistics Unit

This unit has secured the services of reliable service providers to maintain office assets and equipment, including vehicles, in good working condition. The mandatory biannual and end-of-the-year assets physical verifications and certifications have been promptly conducted. Protocol support has also been provided for visa delivery and organization of mission travel. Senior management and staff have been able to attend corporate institutional meetings, regional retreats, meetings, workshops and training, mostly organized online due to COVID19 restrictions.

Finance Unit

The Finance Unit has been processing financial transactions and payments to vendors, consultants and personnel; providing cash advances to implementing partners; ensuring financial advances clearance; and delivering participants' payments through mobile money. The total expenses processed in 2021 amounted to US\$9.13 million which represents 89 per cent budget delivery and a 96 per cent budget utilization rate as of 21 December 2021.

Collaboration at United Nations Country Team level

The Operations team has proactively been involved in the Operations Management Team activities and has effectively supported the implementation of the Business Operation Strategy through participation in the working groups (human resources, procurement, finance, and harmonized approach to cash transfers). The main positive results are the issuance of long-term

agreements for provision of fuel, maintenance of vehicles and provision of Internet. It is worth mentioning the contribution of the Finance team to the timely settlement of the One UN House

Cost Share charges and the active participation of the operations manager in the 2020 Liberia Salary Survey Committee.

KEY FIGURES FOR 2021

2021 Budget	US\$ 9,789,377
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Expenses	US\$ 9,136,533
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Encumbrance	US\$ 639,784
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Delivery rate	89 per cent
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Utilization rate	96 per cent
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CHALLENGES

COVID19 AND OTHER EVENTS

One obvious challenge that contributed to some delays in implementation was the COVID19 pandemic in Liberia, which resulted in a national lockdown. However, the socioeconomic impact of COVID19 was addressed by prioritizing an emergency food security plan. The idea was to expand cultivation, engage in agro-processing, purchasing, and pre-positioning of food stocks, and strengthen coordination within the Food and Nutrition Security Working Group. Some notable achievements were reported; as a result the Working Group continued the initiatives.

The COVID19 pandemic limited the attendance at events, including training. Organizations adopted a new strategy – increasing the number of community

awareness and training sessions, so as to reach the project targeted beneficiaries. As the use of modern technologies (for example, Zoom, Teams and social media) is problematic in many locations, a house-to-house visitation strategy was adapted; this increased beneficiaries' knowledge, interaction and involvement and helped promote early precaution of the pandemic

Heavy rains and bad roads, particularly in the southeast of Liberia, delayed the delivery of farming inputs and training supplies, and inhibited the delivery of training. To address this issue, many programmes attempted to implement most of their activities during the dry season.

CAPACITY LIMITS

The general low capacity of most implementing partners (local) for implementing activities within the set time frames delayed implementation. However, capacity-building is ongoing; for example, UN Women has conducted capacity-building of partners at programme inception and implementation through virtual sessions. These online capacity-building sessions amid the COVID19 situation were helpful.

Some key positions, such as the Deputy Country Representative and the Women's Political Participation and Leadership Programme Specialist, were vacant for a long time. Despite these gaps, the team has been able to deliver programme activities and prepare the 2021 annual workplan in good time.

THE POLITICS OF GENDER-RELATED WORK

The increasing politicization of gender work has led to shrinking civic space for women's organizations. This led to some delays in outputs for the WPPL pillar, as the selected partners and consultants faced some resistance. To address the challenge, communication and collaboration with the MGSCP was strengthened.

A key challenge is resistance and backlash from men with gender bias and who fear losing power, status

and position to women. Thus, male engagement remains a priority.

A lack of public confidence and trust in government structures has greatly hindered the efforts of the MGSCP to comply with international obligations to ensure the protection of girls' and women's rights, and has hindered the adequate implementation of the institutional framework for gender equality in Liberia.

LESSONS LEARNED

BUILDING COLLABORATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Community-centred approaches are vital for any project's success. When communities are given a chance to get involved in implementing a project, they feel part of it and feel obligated to ensure success. With community buy-in and ownership, the sustainability of an intervention will be ensured.

Consensus and agreement with key stakeholders, including government and CSOs, on key programme decisions is crucial, and will build synergy and ownership; continuous discussions and engagement with national partners are necessary for enhancing programme delivery and sustainability of results.

Strong networks and linkages between government institutions and the grass-root level need support in cases where programmes may not be able to reach the communities. Strengthened community networks and structures are also key in EVAWG. In the case of the peace hut initiative and other women-led community networks, the lesson learned was to strengthen existing community networks and structures before focusing on their expansion. This can, in return, result in sustained actions. In addition, recognizing and enhancing the roles of community-led initiatives – such as peace huts – in peacebuilding, by providing technical assistance is a fruitful and strategic approach to addressing gender inequalities at the community level.

BUDGETING AND LEGISLATION

UN Women should continue working at all levels, from ministries down, including working with the Ministry of Finance in the budget preparation phase to support the ministry to ensure gender-disaggregated data is considered before the budget is submitted. Funding to enhance the capacities of local institutions, including community structures, local implementing partners, CSOs and national partners, must be secured and made ongoing and reliable. To assist this, UN Women should support the budget committee to develop guidelines to guide reviews and budget discussion.

UN Women should support civil society's engagement with legislative committees on budget and other gender-related issues as a way of pushing reforms.

Collaborations are also essential to pass new and amended laws in the context of a male-dominated government. Lessons for future engagement include support for more targeted lobbying interventions with political party leaders, and influential actors in the legislative and executive branches. Tools like power mappings and public pledges could support the Women's Legislative Caucus and allies (including the United Nations Country Team and donor good offices) to target power brokers for more strategic interventions. It would also be effective to support CSOs to mobilize citizens who can directly engage their lawmakers to express their interest in gender-responsive legislation.

BUILDING WOMEN'S CAPACITY AND PROVIDING SUPPORT

Gaining new skills, competences and organizational capacities helped women and adolescent girls to participate in socioeconomic activities; enhanced their decision-making roles; and earned them increased respect within and outside their households.

Facilitating access to goods and services (for example, credit and financial services, market information) promotes the economic competitiveness of rural women, and helps ensure their ongoing support and independence after programmes and initiatives are completed.

However, no matter how much women's capacity is increased, long-term benefits will not accrue unless both statutory and customary judicial systems become gender-sensitive, and address gender equality in Liberia.

Similarly, engaging men and promoting equitable intra-household relationships helps in improving women's ongoing livelihoods and breaking down

the barriers that prevent women from achieving their full potential.

Supporting traditional practitioners of FGM to access alternative economic activities promotes their economic empowerment but also helps change social norms by rendering the practice economically unnecessary. Traditional practitioners now have reliable and dependable sources of support from, for example, their climate-smart agriculture programmes, their businesses and the village savings and loan association programmes.

Although women have the rights to own, inherit and manage land, these rights can be difficult to assert in practice. Women need support to assert these rights. There is also a need for an information and knowledge management system for information on land governance. This information should be made available to all, and there must be coordinated approaches to land interventions to avoid replication.

DONORS FOR 2021

- European Union
- Government of Sweden
- United Nations Peacebuilding Fund
- Irish Aid
- Government of Canada
- Multi-Donor Trust Fund Office
- UNAIDS

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Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls

Initiated by the European Union and the United Nations:



United Nations
MPTF Office
Partners Gateway

