



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

LIBERIA



ABBREVIATIONS

AFELL	Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
AWLN	African Women Leaders Network
BfW	Buy from Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ELR	Electoral Law Reform
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
FGM	Female Genital Mutation
GEWE	Gender Equality And Women's Empowerment
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
GRPB	Gender-Responsive Planning, Policy and Budgeting
HR	Human Resources
HP	Harmful Practice
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
MFDP	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NACCEL	National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia
NAP-WPS	National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security



NBC	National Bureau of Concessions
NEC	National Elections Commission
OCA	Organizational Capacity Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SERP	Socio-Economic Response Plan
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRHR	Sexual Reproduction Health and Right
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
VAWiE(/P)	Violence Against Women in Elections(/politics)
VAWG	Violence Against Women And Girls
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPPL	Women's Political Participation and Leadership
WPS	Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Actions





Beneficiary of the adult literacy program supported by UN Women in Pasama, Lofa County, Liberia / UN Women Liberia

INTRODUCTION

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN) has worked strategically in Liberia since 2004. The organization works closely with the Government of Liberia through several line ministries that include the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Labour as well as development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), women's groups and other UN agencies, to advance gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). The work of the UN Women Liberia country office is built around five key pillars, which address the most pressing gender equality concerns for women and girls in Liberia. These are women's political participation and leadership (WPPL); women's economic empowerment (WEE); women, peace and security and humanitarian actions (WPS); ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG); and gender-responsive planning, policy and budgeting (GRP). Through these pillars, UN Women plays a leading role in facilitating change.

The year 2020 was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which negatively impacted the lives of people all over the world. Prior to the pandemic, Liberia's economy was already facing the twin challenges of high inflation and weak consumption.¹ The pandemic and the subsequent mitigative measures taken by the Liberian government to halt the spread of the virus further weakened the country's economic status. Measures such as lockdowns



Marie, Goreth Nizigama - UN Women Liberia Country Representative / UN Women Liberia

and restrictions on the movement of people and goods resulted in economic shocks such as loss of employment and income, as well as increased food prices.² According to the Liberia COVID-19 High-Frequency Phone Monitoring Survey for Households and Firms, conducted by the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, 66.4 percent of households reported being in a terrible food situation, 75.3 percent of households reported

1 World Bank. 2020. *Liberia Economic Update, June 2020: The COVID-19 Crisis in Liberia – Projected Impact and Policy Options for a Robust Recovery*. World Bank, Monrovia. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34271> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

2 See *Liberia: Agriculture livelihoods and food security in the context of COVID-19* (<http://www.fao.org/3/cb3618en/cb3618en.pdf>).



UN Women donates a consignment of goods as part of the COVID-19 response / UN Women Liberia

job loss and 67.5 percent reported loss of income due to the pandemic.³ Women-owned businesses were also adversely affected by the lockdown restrictions, with knock-on effects on women's socioeconomic welfare.

The COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated the existing global crisis of violence against women and girls (VAWG), especially in the domestic sphere. In addition, lockdowns and mobility restrictions limited victims' access to essential services such as psychosocial support, health care and justice. In September 2020, the Government of Liberia declared rape a national emergency following a spike in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), in particular rape. The increase in VAWG unleashed by COVID-19 constitutes a shadow pandemic that needs to be stopped, and this is one of UN Women's main priorities not just in Liberia but globally.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in Liberia as elsewhere, presented numerous challenges to governments and international organizations. In Liberia, the MGCSP and

other government agencies realigned their focus and prioritized the implementation of the government's COVID-19 response plan, which included activities to address the needs of the most vulnerable. As a result, other planned activities were put on hold. In the case of UN Women, some field activities as well as mass campaigns were suspended, not least because international and national consultants who had been contracted by UN Women to support programme activities were unable to travel because of the restrictions imposed. UN Women addressed the crisis by recruiting local consultants and by adopting new ways of working. This included adjusting and refocusing some interventions to include COVID-19 prevention activities and the use of technologies to conduct day-to-day business, for example the use platforms such as Zoom and Teams to conduct meetings.

Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women recorded several significant achievements in 2020, including supporting the Government of Liberia to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in a

³ See *Liberia: Agriculture livelihoods and food security in the context of COVID-19* (<http://www.fao.org/3/cb3618en/cb3618en.pdf>).

gender-responsive manner and supporting the thematic groups that were set up to respond to the pandemic. The UN Country Team (UNCT) in Liberia endorsed the gender-responsive Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP) aligned to the five pillars of the Secretary-General's global UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19. The SERP addresses the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on various vulnerable groups, such as women, children, adolescents, youth, survivors of SGBV, the elderly and migrants, internally displaced persons and host communities, in particular the impacts of loss of income, restricted movement, reduced access to markets, inflation and spikes in the price of essential goods.

Notable achievements of UN Women in Liberia in 2020 include increasing women's access to sustainable rural financial services through the establishment of village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) in various counties, as well as improving food security and nutrition through increased crop production, which included the cultivation of 34.56 hectares of farmland for rice and over 18.5 hectares of farmland for industrial cassava. Rural women also increased their vocational, literacy and numeracy skills through participation in regular training, which in turn led to the improvement of women's organizational and business development skills, as well as an increased understanding of shared household and care-giving roles. UN Women supported the development and dissemination of a "Comprehensive Prevention Strategy" to address VAWG in Liberia. The strategy is the first of its kind to be developed in Africa. In addition, following its declaration of rape as a national emergency, the Government of Liberia and its partners developed the Anti-SGBV Roadmap (2020–2022) to address the increase in cases of SGBV.

Through the MGCSP, the Government of Liberia intensified efforts to achieve gender-sensitive

service delivery, including the provision of equitable and effective justice and security services. In addition, the Government of Liberia demonstrated its commitment to the full implementation of the Second Phase of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019–2023 (NAP-WPS) by strengthening accountability mechanisms and establishing and strengthening the various implementation structures, such as the Technical Working Group and the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit under the MGCSP. In 2020, UN Women Liberia also strengthened the capacity of the electoral management body, the National Elections Commission (NEC), to make it more effective, accountable, transparent and inclusive. As a result, all citizens, but especially women, have an increased say in elections and are benefiting from the NEC's work in ensuring people's right to vote for candidates of their choice. Women held the NEC accountable for electoral violence against women in the special senatorial elections that took place on 8 December 2020 and demanded their right to vote in the electoral districts where polling stations did not open on polling day.

Finally, 2020 marked the 10th anniversary of UN Women, celebrating 10 years of championing women's rights, empowerment and gender equality. The organization started off as UNIFEM and merged into UN Women in 2010, when the UN General Assembly made a historic decision to establish UN Women. In addition, UN Women Liberia also supported the government to commemorate the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, a landmark resolution adopted on 31 October 2000 to affirm the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction.



Electoral stakeholders attend a seminar organised by UN Women in collaboration with the National Elections Commission to share findings and recommendations on the 30 percent gender quota on political party candidate nominations in line with Elections Law 4.5 b and c. In attendance were the Vice President of Liberia, Her Excellency, Dr Jewel Howard Taylor, the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Williametta Saydee Tarr and UN Women Country Representative, Marie Goreth Nizigama / UN Women Liberia

Women's political participation and leadership

Women and girls in Liberia continue to be underrepresented in national and subnational levels of governance. The space for their engagement in governance processes has further shrunk as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic imposed many additional challenges on women, increasing the burden of women's numerous roles and making it even more difficult for women to engage in political processes. In 2020, discussions on electoral law reform (ELR) continued, and important to women's participation and leadership was the recommendation that an enforceable 30 per cent gender quota on political parties' candidate nominations listings be included in the New Elections Law. Despite the country having signed many protocols and international instruments that guarantee women's rights to public participation, among the most important being the Beijing Platform For Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs), the adoption of robust affirmative action into laws remain a challenge. The implementation of existing provisions such as the "endeavour to ensure" that political parties' lists of candidates include at least 30 percent of candidates of each gender remains weak and, as a result, women's participation in leadership, particularly in elections, continues to be low. At the mid-term special senatorial elections in December 2020, 19 female candidates joined the one female incumbent senator (who stood for re-election), giving a total of 20 women out of 118 candidates (17 percent), leading the WPPL programme in Liberia to adopt a multisectoral approach, working with various stakeholders, to support the enhanced participation of women in leadership.

Results realized

The WPPL programme was implemented with the financial and technical support of UN Women Liberia, and among its main achievements are proposed amendments to electoral law submitted to the national legislature by the NEC in 2020. The amendments would require all political parties to meet a gender quota in their list of candidates, and sanctions for non-compliance would be included in Section 4.5 of the elections law. If approved, the amendments will ensure political party compliance with

gender quotas, something that has long been lacking. UN Women Liberia provided technical and financial support for dialogue and consultations, which were organized by the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) – Liberia chapter, CSOs and political parties (i.e. women's representatives of the political parties concerned). In 2020, women's groups, following a period of consultation, submitted to the national legislature a petition requesting a greater decision-making role for women in choosing electoral candidates to

represent political parties and in elections. Women are now more involved in providing peer support and intervention in electoral disputes across party lines, as demonstrated by the mobilization of several women's groups around the Gbarpolu Country female candidate (who was the presumptive winner and had faced violence during elections). Many women's groups supported her throughout the re-run of the election, which bodes well for the future collaboration among women to enhance women's political participation.

In response to a series of reports of incidents of violence against women in elections (VAWiE), the NEC now has in place protocols and guidelines on the prevention of and response to violence against women in politics and elections. Additionally, an action plan to ensure the implementation of the protocols has been developed. The protocols and the implementation plan were developed in close collaboration and consultation with CSOs, the Coalition of Political Party Women in Liberia and the security sector. All citizens, but especially women, now have an increased say and can play a more active role in the electoral processes that determine the political outcomes that will affect their lives. Women held the NEC accountable for the violence against women that occurred during the December 2020 senate elections and demanded their right to vote in the electoral districts where polling stations did not open on polling day. As a result of these efforts, the NEC demonstrated increased accountability and responsiveness by scheduling a re-run

of the elections in the affected districts and counties, including in Gbarpolu county, where the leading female candidate suffered violence.

In 2020, UN Women supported the increased visibility of female candidates and community engagements by providing media channels and platforms through which women could communicate their campaign messages and meet their constituents. Through building and strengthening networks, UN Women enhanced women's solidarity and capacity to seek redress for electoral malpractice alleged by one female candidate and her supporters in the December 2020 elections. CSOs and networks maintained their advocacy so the NEC would hear and adjudicate the case. Moreover, UN Women helped enhance electoral accountability by supporting elections observation and violence against women in elections/politics (VAWiE/P) monitoring and reporting by the AWLN national chapter and women's peace huts. The capacity of the NEC to create an enabling environment for women's participation in elections was also strengthened through the development of a VAWiE/P Protocol and Action Plan. UN Women subsequently promoted the popularization of the Protocol and Action Plan among political parties, the security sector, the judiciary and CSOs to ensure its successful implementation. UN Women also supported young women interested in political leadership through its mentoring programme, as a result of which the young women mentees have enhanced political advocacy and leadership skills, enabling them to advocate for enforceable temporary special measures for women.



Notable achievements

- Women are now more involved in providing peer support and intervention in electoral disputes across party lines.
- Liberia's NEC now has protocols and guidelines in place to deal with violence against women involved in politics and participating in elections.
- The NEC submitted final electoral law amendments to the legislature, which include provisions such as facilitating women's access to polling places as well as increasing gender sensitivity and inclusion, for example by setting enforceable gender quotas for political parties' candidate lists.
- The NEC demonstrated increased accountability and responsiveness by scheduling a re-run of special senatorial elections in districts and counties affected by electoral malpractice, including in Gbarpolu county, where the leading female candidate suffered violence.
- Female representation in the Liberian senate increased from one to two female senators.
- Young women political mentees championed campaigns for more women in the legislature and advocated for temporary special measures in Liberia, thus demonstrating enhanced political leadership and advocacy skills.

Gender-responsive budgeting

Liberia's national policy on gender-responsive planning and budgeting describes the impediments to national planning and budgeting and recognizes the national budget as a *powerful tool* when combined with planning interventions for achieving development objectives.

Both the budget and planning interventions are indicators of the government's commitment to its policies, especially those *promoting gender equality and women's empowerment*.

This is because the national budget reflects how the government mobilizes and allocates public resources, and how it aims to meet the *social and economic needs of the people*, particularly those determined by gender-specific considerations. Thus, the budgetary policy, which sets out how the government will implement its development plans in Liberia, plays a major role in achieving the objective of gender equality. The Government of Liberia has expressed its commitment to gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) since the enactment of the second Public Financial Management Strategy and Action Plan, which runs from 2017 to 2022. For the first time, this includes GRB, with the activities of the inter-ministerial

GRPB Technical Working Group, including the establishment of the MFDP's Gender-responsive Budgeting Unit, being embedded in Thematic Area 2 (Credible Budget to Support Service Delivery). This commitment is rooted in the National Development Agenda 2018–2023. This provides a strong base for institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting. Liberia's National Gender Policy also highlights the importance of gender mainstreaming in government policies and programmes.

GRB 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 gender equality and women's empowerment. GRB focuses on key economic and social issues that are often overlooked or obscured in conventional budget and policy analysis and decision-making.

Results realized

In 2020, a total of 200 participants (125 males and 75 females) from three CSOs attended a capacity-building session in Grand Cape Mount county. Technical support was provided by UN Women and funding support was provided by the Embassy of Sweden. Participants were capacitated and empowered to influence the national budget process from the gender perspective. This was achieved by engaging

with lawmakers during town hall meetings about the national budget and explaining how it affects women and men differently. The aim was to ensure that budgeting meets the needs of women and men equally.

As a strategy to mainstream gender at the national level, UN Women also provided technical and financial support to three government ministries (the Ministry of Labour,

the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Internal Affairs) to help them develop an institutional gender and social inclusion policy in order to:

- mainstream gender in their planning, programming and operations;
- mainstream GRPB in their programmes and operations;
- promote a culture of gender awareness and responsiveness in the ministry; and
- strengthen the ministries' capacity to guide, direct and attain gender equality

in their workplace by providing the relevant knowledge and skills.

As part of its sustained effort to inform the national budgeting process through evidential gender analysis of the budget from a gender perspective, UN Women, in September 2020, facilitated a half-day presentation for the legislative committees on ways, means and finance and public accounts and the Women Legislative Caucus to inform the national budget scrutiny process from a gender perspective.



Participants of the gender responsive budgeting training in Monrovia. / UN Women Liberia

Notable achievements

- More than 200 representatives (125 male and 75 females) from three CSOs participated in a public forum on GRB.
- The participants learned how to hold public institutions and official accountable for their obligation towards gender needs and equality in the budgeting process (monitoring and implementation).
- Three government ministries, namely the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, developed an institutional gender and social inclusion policy with financial and technical support from UN Women.



Alternative economic programs by traditional practitioners / UN Women Liberia

Ending violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations.

It is a 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. Ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) is considered one of the most important and urgent priorities for UN Women in Liberia, where patriarchal social norms are deeply rooted and VAWG is widely accepted. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Spotlight Initiative,⁴ in

conjunction with the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, implemented several interventions to address the pressing needs of, and promote the rights of, women and girls in Liberia. In the case of the UN and UN Women, a single COVID-19 response plan was drawn up, its main priority being to provide the resources and information needed to prevent and respond to COVID-19 and SGBV to those most in need.



Spotlight Initiative donates motorbikes to be used by traditional practitioners to monitor closure of bush schools / UN Women Liberia

Results realized

In order to address the increasing incidence of VAWG in Liberia, UN Women, in collaboration with the Government of Liberia and other key stakeholders, led the Spotlight Initiative team in the design and development of the

Anti-SGBV Roadmap (2020).⁵ The roadmap aims to address deep-rooted cultural and traditional beliefs, and harmful practices (HPs), which are major underlying factors in defining perceptions of and attitudes to sexual violence,

⁴ The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multiyear partnership between the European Union, the Government of Liberia and the UN.

⁵ On 9 September 2020, the Government of Liberia and partners validated the Anti-SGBV Roadmap to address SGBV for the next two years (2020–2022). The Anti-SGBV Roadmap guides future investment on addressing rape and other forms of SGBV and seeks to change the current dynamics of “business as usual”.



Some of the media practitioners who attended the Spotlight Initiative supported media training on gender sensitive reporting on SGBV in the context of COVID-19 / UN Women Liberia

as well as the treatment of survivors and victims. The Government of Liberia allocated USD2 million from its national budget to address the issues outlined in the roadmap.

In 2020, the EVAWG pillar prioritized the dissemination of information in relation to SGBV/HPs/sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and COVID-19, as the spread of misinformation nationally, as well as globally, threatened to undermine efforts to control the pandemic.⁶ By enhancing community outreach, awareness on the prevention of SGBV/HPs/SRHR and COVID-19 was increased. Information was disseminated through 216 radio talk shows, and 18 jingles were produced and broadcast on community radio stations across the five counties targeted by the Spotlight Initiative. The talk shows and jingles were broadcast in various local dialects, enabling community residents to fully understand the national guidelines on COVID-19, as well as information on the referral pathway for SGBV cases. In addition, 23,193 community dwellers in 212 communities across the five

Spotlight Initiative counties were reached with awareness messages and campaigns challenging harmful social norms and gender stereotypes and providing information on COVID-19 prevention and response guidelines.

To enhance the capacity of communities to address the increase in cases of SGBV, 30 local women's rights organizations and five CSO secretariats received subgrants. These grants enabled the organizations to reach 385 communities through community engagement activities such as community dialogues, training and peer-to-peer meetings. A total of 56,021 people were reached with information on SGBV and COVID-19 prevention and response. In addition, 9807 information, education and communication materials (1211 stickers and 8596 posters/flyers) were distributed in public places to support accurate information dissemination in communities. The unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent increase in SGBV cases also demonstrated the importance of media practitioners being well trained on gender-

⁶ <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/social-media-covid-19-a-global-study-of-digital-crisis-interaction-among-gen-z-and-millennials>

sensitive media reporting to ensure that survivors and victims are portrayed fairly. Through the Spotlight Initiative, UN Women trained 288 media practitioners (91 females and 197 males) from 66 media institutions (44 radio stations, 13 newspapers, 3 television stations and 6 online/social media outlets) in gender-sensitive reporting. As a result, in a six-month period, over 37 stories adhering

ultimate goal of abandonment of the practice of FGM. The practitioners also successfully organized themselves into 12 VSLAs, each with 25 members. The groups generated a total fund of LRD2,149,775.00, which includes shares valued at LRD2,023,945.00, social funds of LRD120,050.00 and fines amounting to LRD5780.00. The traditional practitioners also completed the first phase of climate-smart



Alternative economic programs by traditional practitioners / UN Women Liberia

to gender-sensitive reporting guidelines were produced and published on various news channels, including the *Liberian Observer*, *Bush Chicken*, *News Public Trust* and *New Republic*. In addition, the trained media practitioners established a network to help each other continue to report in a gender-sensitive manner

Ending female genital mutation (FGM) is one of the main priorities of the EVAWG pillar at UN Women. In 2020, 300 traditional practitioners in the five counties targeted by the Spotlight Initiative were trained in business development and skills as part of the provision of alternative economic livelihood support to traditional practitioners with the

agriculture programmes and cultivated and sold some of the crops harvested, including corn, okra, pepper, bitter balls and cassava. Preparation for the extension of these farms is on course for the next farming session.

In addition, 10 county inspectors and traditional heads were empowered and capacitated to monitor and report on violations of the policy statement suspending Sande activities⁷ in Liberia. In 2020, five violations were reported and dealt with by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (NACCCEL). Consultative meetings on the renewal of the Ganta policy statement,⁸ which expired in September 2020, are under way.

7 The Sande Society initiates girls into adulthood by performing certain rituals and activities, including FGM.

8 <https://spotlightinitiative.org/es/node/27535#:~:text=The%20Ganta%20Declaration%20was%20signed,activities%20including%20Female%20Genital%20Mutilation.>



Peace Brigades in Lofa County conduct awareness raising activities on SGBV / UN Women Liberia

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund – Spotlight Initiative programme

In 2020, 150 peace brigades from 145 communities gained enhanced skills and knowledge to monitor and report political violence cases and any other form of VAWG, as well as to prevent violence and resolve conflicts.

They formed 15 community action groups in 15 districts in Lofa, Grand Gedeh and Montserrado counties to ensure that rape cases are not compromised at community level, as was the case in the past. In addition, functional peace desks were established in 15 communities in three counties (Lofa, Grand Gedeh and Montserrado), their purpose being to give women the confidence to report violence against them. According to the peace desk officers' reports, there has been decline in domestic violence cases since the establishment of peace desks at the

community level, as these serve as a deterrent to violence.

In Bomi and Bong Counties, UN Women financially supported the establishment of two Women's Power Centres, a permanent space where gender actors can provide services and resources for women and girls. Here, women can access health services and information about their rights. The centres also serve as a physical space where women groups/coalitions and SGBV prevention committees can continue their work on advocacy, social and economic empowerment.

In addition, the Safe Mobile App, which was created to enable reporting of incidents of SGBV in schools and communities, was validated in October 2020 to help prevent VAWG. The app is being used to capture real-time data on SGBV in selected counties (Montserrado,

Grand Cape Mount and Bomi counties). The data are managed by the institution Girls for Change, and an ongoing engagement on the wider extension of the app to Gender Justice Clubs, Men Champions and stakeholders in other counties is under way.

Notable achievements

- UN Women, through the Spotlight Initiative, supported the Government of Liberia to develop an Anti-SGBV Roadmap (2020).
- Community leaders (e.g. traditional and religious leaders, youth) and members are aware of available services for the prevention of and response to SGBV, HP, and COVID-19.
- A total of 300 traditional practitioners in the five Spotlight Initiative counties have discontinued FGM practices and are now benefiting economically from other initiatives such as climate-smart agriculture, VSLAs and business and literacy skills for self-sustainability.
- A total of 288 media practitioners in Liberia have enhanced their knowledge of and commitment to gender-sensitive reporting.
- Women's Power Centres have been established in Bomi and Bong counties and are being used as a permanent space for gender actors to provide services and resources for women and girls.
- The Safe Mobile App was validated in 2020 and is being used to report incidents of SGBV in schools and communities.



Women Power Centre / UN Women Liberia



Distribution of COVID-19 materials / UN Women Liberia

Women's economic empowerment

The women's economic empowerment (WEE) pillar works towards the social and economic empowerment of the most vulnerable women and girls in Liberia: rural women, the elderly, informal workers and low-skilled women.

Efforts include, but are not limited to, working with women to improve their livelihood opportunities; to enhance their leadership and their participation in decision-making roles; to improve their digital and financial literacy; to increase their business and entrepreneurial skills; to facilitate their access to financial services and markets; and to strengthen their land rights and ensure a gender-responsive policy environment. UN Women achieves its WEE pillar objectives by working closely with national stakeholders such as the Government of Liberia, CSOs and the private sector, as well as by collaborating with the women who are most in need. As in other thematic areas, in

2020 some resources dedicated to the WEE pillar had to be redirected to strengthen national efforts aimed at controlling the spread of COVID-19, including to support the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic on household welfare. Through the one UN and UN Women's COVID-19 response plan, the WEE pillar reached its beneficiaries with information on COVID-19 prevention through awareness-raising campaigns, distributed resources such as washing supplies and provided financial contributions through VSLAs to support women's and girls' social and economic well-being.

Results realized

During 2020, a number of the objectives of the WEE pillar were realized. Most support was directed at mobilizing networks, namely the Liberia National Rural Women Structure, the Liberia Marketing Association and the National Peace Hut Women of Liberia, to assemble their members and communities for awareness-raising activities on COVID-19 in Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bong, Lofa and Gbarpolu counties. Washing supplies (e.g. handwash, detergent, wash buckets, etc.) were also distributed to a total of 918 women from six communities. In addition, over 21 VSLAs affected by the national lockdown in Margibi, Grand Bassa, Montserrado and Lofa

counties were supported financially. Members of these VSLAs were unable to actively engage in income-generating activities because of the lockdown and, as a result, had to use their savings to buy food and other household supplies. By providing financial contributions, these associations were able to continue to operate.

Under the WEE pillar, UN Women also commissioned a national consultant to carry out a GRB analysis of the national budget allocation for the COVID-19 response, with support from the MFDP. Key recommendations from the analysis included that the Government

of Liberia should revise the national COVID-19 response plan to ensure the full integration of gender-sensitive response planning and should publish donations and disbursements from COVID-19 emergency relief funds and that it should use gender-disaggregated data to justify budget allocations and expenditures. The recommendations were also considered during the planning of the UN Women 2021 Annual Work Plan. As part of its regular programme implementation, and with the objective of increasing opportunities for entrepreneurship, 50 women beneficiaries accessed new employment opportunities with the telecommunications company Orange Liberia. These women became mobile money agents, operating 50 mobile money stations in Montserrado, Margibi and Grand Bassa counties. In 2020, these women provided mobile money transaction services to over 15,000 customers. In addition, the agents engaged in the registration of SIM cards and the opening of mobile bank accounts, which provided additional income. In addition to providing courses on digital literacy and Orange Money,⁹ by improving adult literacy and providing training in next-level business skills, as well as on the use of social media applications (e.g. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger), the women were able to acquire the skills necessary to report from the field during the national lockdown.

Women who benefit from training in additional skills such as mobile banking and organizational management are able to actively participate in, and even lead, more activities (e.g. rural women can participate in parent–teacher association meetings, community meetings, voluntary work, climate-smart agriculture programmes, teaching, oil production, etc.). These new skills enhance their decision-making roles and increase the respect in which they are held both within and

outside their households and communities. In Montserrado, Margibi and Grand Bassa counties, 400 women beneficiaries accessed sustainable rural financial services through 16 newly established VSLAs. In 2020, women’s access to finance was made a high priority under the WEE pillar in order to ensure that women had economic security and livelihood opportunities during the pandemic. Beneficiaries reported that access to VSLAs increased their self-esteem, which subsequently increased their participation in decision-making roles at the household and community levels. Being part of community associations also improved the women’s social status. For example, being able to contribute financially to their households placed these women on a more equal footing with their spouses. In addition, the newly established VSLAs, together with 31 existing ones across Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Maryland, River Gee and Sinoe counties, provided USD58,750 (LRD9,400,000) in rural credit to a total of 1175 women beneficiaries. This money was used to access finance for building and expanding women’s existing businesses.

In Margibi and Grand Bassa counties, 401 women who benefited from credit, and their households, improved their food security and nutrition through increased crop production, which included the cultivation of 34.56 hectares of farmland for rice and over 18.5 hectares of farmland for industrial cassava. An increase in crop yield was reported, resulting in the production of four metric tonnes of paddy rice in Grand Bassa and Margibi counties. Beneficiaries were able to increase their crop yields and generate more income because the credit they received enabled them to access farming inputs and labour-saving technologies (e.g. rice- and cassava-processing machines, etc.).

⁹ Orange Money is a mobile money system that allows customers to access basic financial services using their Orange mobile phone numbers.

The Buy from Women (BfW) Initiative¹⁰ in Liberia aims to connect women smallholder farmers with information, finance and markets through a digital platform (web and mobile based). UN Women began development work on the digital platform in 2020, and it is expected that it will be launched in the fourth quarter of 2021. Training on the use of the platform has been conducted with

BfW focal points, and at least 15 SLAs have been established in targeted communities, providing women with access to sustainable rural credit for investing in agribusinesses for income generation and better livelihoods. The BfW focal points have also been trained as SLA agents in their communities, providing extension and advisory services to women SLA members at the community level.



Climate smart agriculture / UN Women Liberia

Notable achievements

- A total of 400 women accessed sustainable rural financial services through the 16 newly established VSLAs.
- Washing supplies were distributed to 918 women and awareness-raising campaigns on COVID-19 prevention were carried out.
- UN Women supported the GRB analysis of the national budget allocation for the COVID-19 response.
- Fifty women accessed new employment opportunities with Orange Liberia.
- A total of 401 women were able to access credit and as a result increase their food security and improve nutrition in their households.

¹⁰ <https://www.buyfromwomen.org/>



Beneficiary of the vocational skills training program in Pasama, Lofa County, Liberia / UN Women Liberia

Women, peace and security

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 mainstream gender into national peace-building 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 peace-building and to empower them economically.

Results realized

Gender mainstreamed in key security institutions

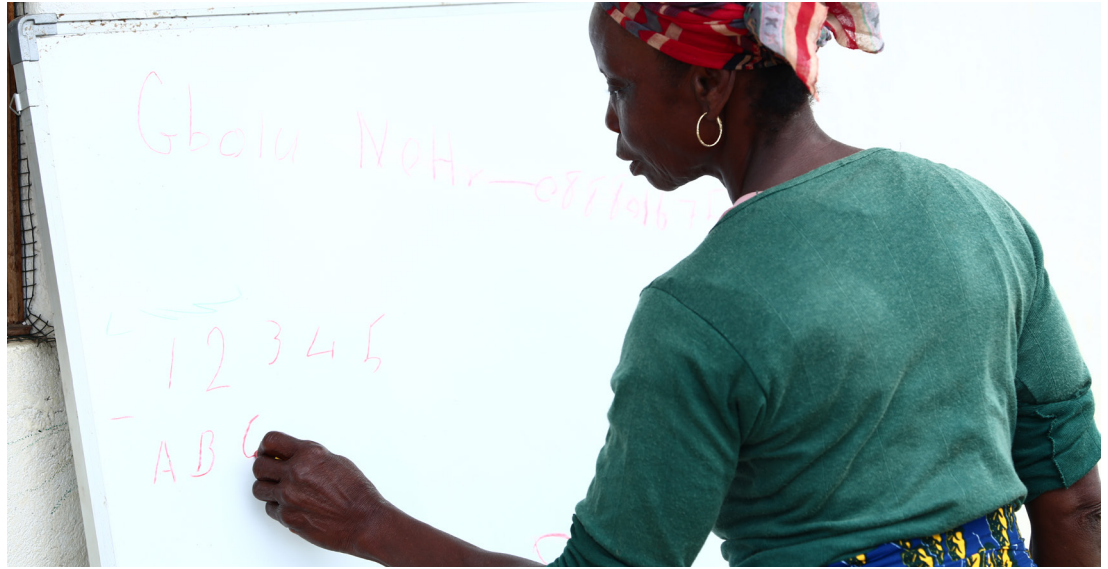
Through the MGCSP, the Government of Liberia intensified its efforts to achieve gender-sensitive service delivery including the provision of equitable and effective justice and security services. Gender policies for security institutions such as the Ministry of Justice and the Liberia National Fire Service have been developed, while the development of the gender policy for the Ministry of National Defense is ongoing.

Commitment to NAP-WPS

The Government of Liberia demonstrated its commitment to the full implementation of the Second Phase of the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (NAP-WPS) by strengthening accountability mechanisms and establishing and strengthening the various implementation structures such as the

Technical Working group and the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit at MGCSP. In addition, key systems to strengthen accountability in the implementation of the NAP-WPS were developed and are in place, and the capacities of civil servants in the areas of monitoring and reporting on the NAP-WPS have been strengthened. The Government of Liberia also affirmed its commitment to fully implement NAP-WPS in the Development Partners Forum on Gender, chaired and organized by UN Women and the Embassy of Sweden in collaboration with the MGCSP. During this forum, representatives from the governments of China, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Ireland showed considerable interest in supporting the implementation of the NAP-WPS.

Furthermore, with technical support from the country office, the Government of Liberia developed and submitted its 2019 State Party Report on the African Union Continental



Beneficiary of the vocational skills training program in Pasama, Lofa County, Liberia / UN Women Liberia

Results Framework on WPS. The African Union report serves as a catalytic advocacy instrument for civil society to advance the implementation of NAP-WPS by holding the government accountable for implementing its commitments. Meanwhile, with technical and financial support from UN Women, 102 civil servants from key government ministries and agencies enhanced their knowledge on the NAP-WPS and on results-based management and gender-responsive monitoring and reporting.

Development of a gender-responsive UN Framework for the immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19

The UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 was developed. In August 2020, the UNCT endorsed the SERP, aligned to the five pillars of the Secretary-General's global UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19. Throughout the SERP, special attention is given to vulnerable groups. It emphasizes the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on various vulnerable groups such as women, children, adolescents, youth, survivors of SGBV, the elderly and migrants, internally displaced persons and host communities, in particular the impacts of loss of income,

restricted movement, reduced access to markets, inflation and spikes in the prices of essential goods. The SERP is also aligned to the SDGs and outlines an integrated support package to protect the needs and rights of people most affected by the pandemic, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Provision of dignity kits to 6000 female Ivorian refugees

UN Women in collaboration with the MGCSP and the UNCHR provided 350 dignity kits to 6000 female Ivorian refugees who came to Liberia following political unrest in Cote d'Ivoire. Support included the provision of clothing (Ankara fabric), bed sheets, underclothes, toothbrushes, toothpaste, sanitary pads and towels. This was in line with the one UN approach to service delivery to vulnerable groups.

Monitoring report on the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations validated

Representatives from the legislature, the Law Reform Commission, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, CSOs and the UN in Liberia validated an assessment on the

implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations. The assessment highlights the progress made so far on the legislative reform on gender in line with the recommendations suggested by the TRC report. The TRC put forward 207 recommendations to address the issues that led to the civil crisis from 1989 to 2003, of which 41 relate directly to women. The Independent National Commission on Human Rights prepared the report with technical support from UN Women.

Institutional structural changes realized

The Government of Liberia has promoted the gender sections of all government ministries and agencies to departments, and the heads of sections to the position of director. As a result of this development, gender directors now have a seat at senior-level meetings, which strategically positions them as strong gender advocates. This key achievement is a result of UN Women's enhanced engagement in mainstreaming gender in key government ministries and agencies, especially security institutions.

Increased access to legal aid by survivors of sexual and gender-based violence

UN Women worked in collaboration with the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) to provide legal aid to survivors of SGBV. Under this partnership, AFELL represented the legal interests of eight survivors of SGBV from Montserrado and Grand Bassa counties. In all cases, the perpetrators were found guilty. In addition, 37 cases were resolved through mediation, with the survivors opting not to go to court. The partnership between AFELL and UN Women Liberia is in line with stringent measures put in place by the government to reduce SGBV during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to an increase in incidents of rape.

An institutional needs assessment on innovative financing rolled out for the first time

Considering the need to mobilize financial resources for the NAP-WPS, UN Women and the MFDP conducted an institutional needs assessment on innovative financing as a first step towards developing a comprehensive innovative financing strategy that will guide the work of the government and CSOs.



UN Women partnered with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to support women-owned tailoring businesses affiliated to the Liberia National Tailoring Union to produce 10,000 masks that were distributed to women, girls and children in Montserrado and Margibi counties in Liberia in response to COVID-19 pandemic/ UN Women Liberia



Konia Peace Hut, a centre established to assist rural women with conflict prevention and peace building / UN Women Liberia

Enhanced capacity of the peace huts women in business planning and financial management

As the women in peace huts move towards financial sustainability and independence, 18 representatives, including members of the national leadership, of women in peace huts were trained to enhance their knowledge on business planning, budgeting and financial management. This training was supported by the UN Women Liberia country office with the aim of ensuring that the peace huts are financially independent. Further to this, an organizational capacity assessment (OCA) was conducted to inform the support needed to strengthen the secretariat and leadership of the peace huts women network and to set up an office in Totota, Bong county. The OCA spells out clear recommendations to address the pertinent needs of the peace huts women, which were reviewed by UN Women Liberia for possible action. Several capacity-building sessions are being considered.

A perception survey on "strengthening land governance and dispute resolution mechanisms" was carried

A perception survey on "strengthening land governance and dispute resolution

mechanisms" was carried out. The findings of the survey revealed that the power and gender dynamics affecting land governance in Liberia are very clear, with perceptions of men towards women's land ownership defined as mainly patriarchal in most rural communities.

Gender assessment of the Liberia concessions and dispute resolution processes completed

The gender assessment provides insights into the current land dispute resolution processes and legal structures and highlights the need for intensified efforts in mainstreaming gender and inclusivity in land processes, which is evidently lacking. The outputs were achieved in collaboration with line ministries and other government institutions including the National Bureau of Concessions (NBC) and the Liberia Land Authority (LLA). These have been approved by the Office of the Legal Advisor to the President.

Enhanced knowledge of civil servants from the Liberian Land Authority and the National Bureau of Concessions on gender and land management

The knowledge levels of 30 civil servants (15 women and 15 men) from the Cooperative

Development Agency, LLA and the NBC were enhanced following a three-day training course

on land, gender and concessions in Monrovia, Liberia. The training was the first of its kind.



Part of the COVID-19 response / UN Women Liberia

Notable achievements

- Gender policies were developed for security institutions such as the Ministry of Justice and the Liberia National Fire Service.
- The Government of Liberia committed to the full implementation of the Second Phase of the NAP-WPS.
- The 2019 State Party Report on the African Union Continental Results Framework on WPS was developed and submitted.
- The UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 was developed.
- Access to legal aid was increased for survivors of SGBV.
- The business planning and financial management capacity of peace huts women was enhanced.
- Civil servants from the LLA and the NBC were trained in gender and land management.
- Dignity kits were provided to 6000 female Ivorian refugees.



Members of the Konia Peace Hut led by Chairperson, Mama Tarnue. / UN Women Liberia

The year 2020 presented new challenges for UN Women, in addition to ongoing ones, but these also created the opportunity to develop solutions and to learn lessons.

- Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated travel and social restrictions, efforts were made to keep the implementation of the projects on track. UN Women and its partners agreed to recruit consultants from within Liberia when travel restrictions made it difficult to recruit international consultants. To address implementation challenges, UN Women had to make changes to strategies and associated funding to enable continuity of work in the COVID-19 context. For instance, the replacement of international consultants with national consultants meant that UN Women staff had to provide more technical support and spend more time monitoring and supervising to assure the quality of their results, which also had budget implications.
- One of the main ongoing challenges to the promotion of gender equality in Liberia is that reliable statistics

Challenges

and gender-disaggregated data are limited. The Government of Liberia, in compliance with the amendment to the Public Financial Management Law of 2019, is expected shortly to relaunch the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) budgeting for fiscal year 2022. Under the framework, the government is expected to develop guidelines for the MTEF manual to include emerging issues such as GRB. In the absence of data on the gender impact of budgetary allocations to inform GRPB by receiving entities (ministries, agencies and commissions), the likelihood of resources allocated through the national budget being used to promote women's economic empowerment and to address VAGW/HPs and gender inequality remains low. UN Women, together with partners such as Embassy of Sweden and the European Union, is supporting research on the national gender equality profile in Liberia, with the aim of collecting gender-related information.

- A further longstanding challenge is presented by inadequate judicial structures and limited capacity and logistical resources, as a result of which it is not possible to fast-track the prosecution of SGBV cases. These deficiencies in the legal system have allowed perpetrators of SGBV to operate with impunity, leading survivors to lose trust in the justice system. To address this challenge, recommendations have been made in the Anti-SGBV Roadmap, which is to decentralize delivery of justice through Court "E", which is a special court established in 2017 responsible for adjudicating SGBV cases.

- To address the challenges presented by the travel restrictions as a result of the pandemic, the WEE pillar was able to utilize local Ministry of Agriculture extension workers and MGCSP county coordinators, already involved in the programmes, to support monitoring and supervision efforts at the district and community levels. The extension workers and county coordinators

played a key role in following up with beneficiaries at the community level and reported back to relevant ministries and UN Women. To overcome the barrier of not being able to conduct physical meetings, key stakeholders were provided with internet scratch cards to enable them to access the internet and participate in virtual meetings.

Lessons learned

- Culturally sensitive issues supported by the Spotlight Initiative in Liberia, such as ending FGM, need ongoing efforts to maintain buy-in from traditional and religious leaders, cultural elders and community members. To ensure that key actors' voices and recommendations are considered, the Spotlight Initiative continues to work with key stakeholders at every level of implementation and through consultative dialogues, which is crucial to overcome any future resistance.
- Empowering women's groups to support women candidates proved to be a powerful vehicle to combat VAWiE. This strategy led to the development of a platform for women monitoring VAWiE cases and electoral management, and for demanding accountability, transparency and justice. This also set a precedent for the future, showing that women's solidarity is key to engendering changes in policy and practice. This is demonstrated by the events that occurred in Gbarpolu county during the December 2020 special senatorial elections, when women from various CSOs and women's networks, including the peace hut women, joined forces to support the female candidate and to monitor and report on VAWiE. During those elections, peace hut women also produced and disseminated reports on electoral violence, non-opening of polls and VAW, which led to the rescheduling of elections in Nimba and Gbarpolu counties.
- During the period Liberia was in lockdown, the Spotlight Initiative leveraged virtual platforms to hold training sessions and webinars on a variety of topics, such as the "South-south learning exchange for CSOs" and "Gender-sensitive media reporting". This approach was very effective and helped mitigate COVID-19 risks and achieve project results in a timely manner. The Spotlight Initiative has continued to use this approach in 2021 to combat the spread of COVID-19. By using information and communication technology as a tool to bridge gaps in services, the Spotlight Initiative has been able to continue to provide essential services during periods of movement restrictions.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic provided an insight into the importance of crisis preparedness and contingency planning. UN Women's collaboration with the Government's National

COVID-19 Response plan represented an important alignment with national coordination mechanisms. However, UN Women recognized the need for additional measures and critical interventions that were not included in the plan, such as the provision of food baskets to help rural communities cope with the economic shock of the pandemic and to survive until they could once more participate in agricultural work.

- Investing in joint programming is a strategic approach to achieve a direct impact on GEWE by providing an opportunity for participating agencies to closely liaise with each other and to harmonize and jointly plan, implement and monitor activities, and thereby improve synergy and complementarity. Similarly, the strategic partnership also helps in resource mobilization, as was

the case in the reporting year with the organization of the Development Partner Donor Forum on Gender, which focused on WPS. UN Women Liberia was able to mobilize up to 15 key multilateral and bilateral institutions in Liberia, all of which committed to support the NAP-WSP. Furthermore, at the end of 2020, the Embassy of Ireland formally engaged in discussions about funding some key priorities under the country office strategic note. Women's solidarity in the face of common development challenges is key to pushing for legal and policy reforms and their implementation, as exemplified by the contribution of the peace hut women during the December 2020 special senatorial elections (reporting on, and corroborating reports of, failure to open of polls and VAWiE).



Ingrid Wetterqvist, Swedish Ambassador, UN Women Country Representative and Konia Women / UN Women Liberia

Liberia Country Office Operations Unit 2020 support achievements

In conformity with the corporate country offices architecture, the Liberia Country Office Operations Unit comprises the following units:

- the Finance Unit
- the Procurement Unit
- the Administration and Logistics Unit
- the Human Resources Unit.

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.

To meet these obligations efficiently, the Liberia Country Office Operations team was restructured in 2020 to reach a workforce of 14 staff including six drivers. This staffing level was deemed necessary to better support the delivery of programmatic activities. In this regard, improvement in the area of human resources (HR) was achieved by recruiting an administration associate, who acts as the focal point for all HR issues. In addition, resources mobilization capacity will be strengthened by the recruitment of a partnership and resource mobilization officer. The incumbent joined the position in June 2020. Recruitment of an HR assistant was launched in 2020 and the successful candidate began work in April 2021. The recruitment of the procurement assistant was finalized during the same period.

The major achievement of the Operations Unit in 2020 was keeping the office running despite the COVID-19 limitations. The office business

continuity plan was aligned with that of the UNCT and with guidelines issued by UN Women head office, which were amended to address the effects of the pandemic and to enforce COVID-19 prevention measures (including regulating access to the UN Liberia head office at One UN House). Through application of this guidance, which recognizes the safety of staff, consultants and other stakeholders as the ultimate priority, the work of the office has continued. To this end, some innovative policies have been put in place. For example, staff can discuss with their supervisors the feasibility of alternative working arrangements, such as teleworking. Consultants' contracts have been reviewed and now included access to protective measures such as testing, masks and the provision of teleconferencing tools. These innovative measures have minimized the risk of exposure to the pandemic and had ensured that the office can continue to deliver the activities needed to meet its core mandate of gender equality. The office has been able to maintain its usual workload by adopting virtual meetings, online document signing and online reporting and cash advances clearance. All units have contributed to the achievement of the common goal.

The Procurement Unit identified spacious premises that allow physical distancing during

events. The procurement and transport teams were instrumental in providing equipment and supplies in the field in localities where an emergency humanitarian situation had been identified. As a result, the office also contribute to the delivery of the government's COVID-19 response plan, ensuring that the poorest segments of the population in remote rural areas were not overlooked.

The Finance Unit exercised control over commitments and cash transactions related to various vendors. Its supervision covered the partner agreement risk assessment, which has become even more sensitive because of the pandemic, the monitoring of cash transfers to partners and clearance of advances. Monitoring had been put in place to ensure that financial reports are generated in a timely manner. As a result, the office has been able to meet its donor reporting commitments. It has also met its target of zero partner advances aged more than seven months by the end of the year. The Finance Unit also made an appreciable contribution to the 2019 partners National Implementation Audit, launched by the HQ programme oversight team. As a result of the pandemic restrictions, this audit was conducted remotely and country office staff were required to implement frequent follow-up with selected partners.

The overall achievement is reflected in the budget management figures. The total 2020 budget was USD7.7 million. The project delivery rate achieved as of 31 December 2020 was 82 per cent. The budget utilization recorded at the same date was 97 per cent, which reflects more services delivered on time to

beneficiaries and timely financial reporting to our development partners.

The office was able to implement all the recommendations of the 2019 internal audit. However, continuous actions are being implemented to increase the efficiency of resources management by tracking the turnaround time of operations actions, using the e-procurement platform and other corporate tools as prescribed. Support has also been granted to assess the capacity of the implementing partners and increase their performance by helping them put in place adequate internal policies and delegation of authority and by ensuring timely and results-based reporting. This has been facilitated by the new corporate Partner and Grants Agreement Management System, which is currently being implemented.

During 2020, the UN Women Liberia Operations Team was able to contribute to the harmonization work within the Operation Management Team related to the development of the 2020 UN Business Operations Strategy. Contributions were delivered through diverse working groups. The Operations Team has also been involved in the preparation of the Liberia 2020 comprehensive salary survey.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that collaboration is the key to successfully dealing with adversity or challenges. The UN Women Liberia country office has demonstrated that, by mobilizing internal human and financial resources and safeguarding safety, it is possible to ensure highly resilient programme delivery. However, success is achievable only if we adhere to open collaboration with our partners (e.g., UNCT, donors, government, CSOs).

Impact stories

Impact story 1: Spotlight Initiative rescues woman from captivity (EVAWG)

After spending four months in the bush with her legs shackled as punishment for violating Sande society traditional practices, 38-year-old Evelyn James* was relieved to finally be free.

In Liberia, there are two secret societies for initiating people into adulthood – one for women and one for men. Ms. James was given a three-year “sentence” by the head of the local Sande bush school for singing a song about men’s initiation, something women are forbidden from doing. Ms. James was leg-cuffed, tortured and left in the bush near one of the Sande centres. As a result of the collective efforts of CSOs, Spotlight Initiative and women’s rights groups, Ms James was released in November, after only four months, and was treated in hospital for infections developed during her captivity.

“After attending a community meeting to provide information on the EU and UN Spotlight Initiative ... one woman approached me and told me that Ms James was being held in the bush against her will”, explains Boakai Yamah, a member of the Spotlight-supported Lofa Civil Society Organization Network Secretariat on Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Traditional Practices.

“I convened a meeting of all gender-based violence taskforce members and we contacted the relevant authorities ... to intervene for the release of Ms James”, said Mr Yamah. He brought together the County Gender Coordinator, County Superintendent, County Inspector, the head of the NACCEL and the District Commissioner of Kolahun and Paramount Chief of that Clan, who is the custodian of culture. The Chairperson of the Council in Lofa County ordered the immediate release of Ms. James.

“The traditional practitioner responsible for punishing Ms. James has been fined and suspended from practising any traditional activity in Lofa by the heads of the NACCEL Lofa branch,” says Merlin Daniel Dennis, a programme officer for the Spotlight Initiative in Lofa.

“Women will no longer be subjected to harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, but will live freely in their communities to support their families.”

Suspension of harmful practices in Lofa County

In addition to demanding Ms James's release, CSOs under the Spotlight Initiative coordinated with the NACCEL leadership and practitioners in the community to suspend Sande Society activities entirely in the county.

Furthermore, all the girls who had been initiated into the bush school – the place where girls undergo a series of rituals, including FGM – were released. All Sande bush schools in the district were closed.

“Women will no longer be subjected to harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, but will live freely in their communities to support their families”, said Mr Dennis. “Girls will now focus on education within the conventional school system.”

In Liberia, an estimated 50 per cent of women and girls aged 15 – 49 have undergone FGM, according to the 2013 Demographic and Health Survey. The Spotlight Initiative seeks to eliminate all forms of violence against women, including harmful practices such as FGM.

Impact story 2: A success story of a rural cross-border trader (WEE)



Mobile money training facilitated by 'Orange Liberia' with support from UN Women/ UN Women Liberia

“Before my participation in the UN Women-led Joint Programme on Rural Women Economic Empowerment, I used to sell charcoal in the local market in Greenville as a community market woman. I wanted to become a cross-border trader to make more money but didn’t understand how this could be done. Moreover, I had no confidence in myself as a petty trader because I never understood how to better manage my business to get more money, including the security issues that many women traders face at border points.”

“When I participated in the literacy and business skills classes and later joined my local VLSA, I was able to better understand what cross-border trading is and my rights as a cross-border trader. The programme opened my eyes and now I cross the borders in the region to trade and to buy goods. I now have the confidence and knowledge as a trader and as a woman and I use my local VSLA as a space in my town to also discuss issues (GBV, sexual exploitation and abuse, extortion, harassment, etc.) affecting women traders for action to be taken by the local government.”

“I am now a registered member of the Association of Women in Cross Border Trade, which is providing me with information, services, finances and skills training under the programme. My business has also grown very big, and I continue to get mentoring and coaching services from the programme through my community-based facilitator and the Association of Women in Cross Border Trade.”

Mariama Fallah, Sinoe county, Liberia

Impact story 3: UN Women and MGCSP support women owned tailoring businesses (WPS)



Beneficiaries of the vocational skills training program supported by UN Women in Pasama, Lofa County, Liberia / UN Women Liberia

As part of its continuous effort to support the Government of Liberia to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women partnered with the MGCSP to support women-owned tailoring businesses affiliated to the Liberia National Tailoring Union to produce 10,000 masks that were distributed to women, girls and children in Montserrado and Margibi counties in Liberia.

Under the partnership, UN Women, with funding from the Embassy of Sweden, provided financial resources amounting to USD27,500.00 to the Women, Girls and Children pillar for the COVID-19 response that was led by the MGCSP for the production of masks.

“We want women-led tailoring groups to produce the masks so that they can get something for being part of the fight and for being able to produce something for women and children to use and be protected”, said the Honourable Williamatta Piso Saydee-Tarr, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection. She said that the initiative to produce

10,000 masks was intended to help to support women running small businesses. The support brought relief to the women who own tailoring businesses that had been adversely impacted by COVID-19, most of whom were struggling financially.

“This initiative is going to benefit us a lot especially looking at this time when we are not doing anything. It will economically empower us. As we carry on the production, whatsoever we will get from there, we can find something for our family to eat”, said Isatta K. Passewe, from the Virtuous Women Multipurpose Corporation, one of the beneficiaries.

According to another beneficiary, Tina Brisbane, who runs a tailoring shop, the project will help her business, which is on the verge of collapse because of the economic crisis created by the outbreak.

Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative, reiterated that the organization is committed to supporting the Government of Liberia to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic: “We want to ensure that women in most vulnerable communities have masks to protect themselves from COVID-19. We want to ensure that small businesses in the tailoring sector that are led by women and have been affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19 get assistance so that they can benefit from the production of masks and are able to continue with their activities and are able to help their families”, she said.

The Embassy of Sweden provided financial support to produce the masks.

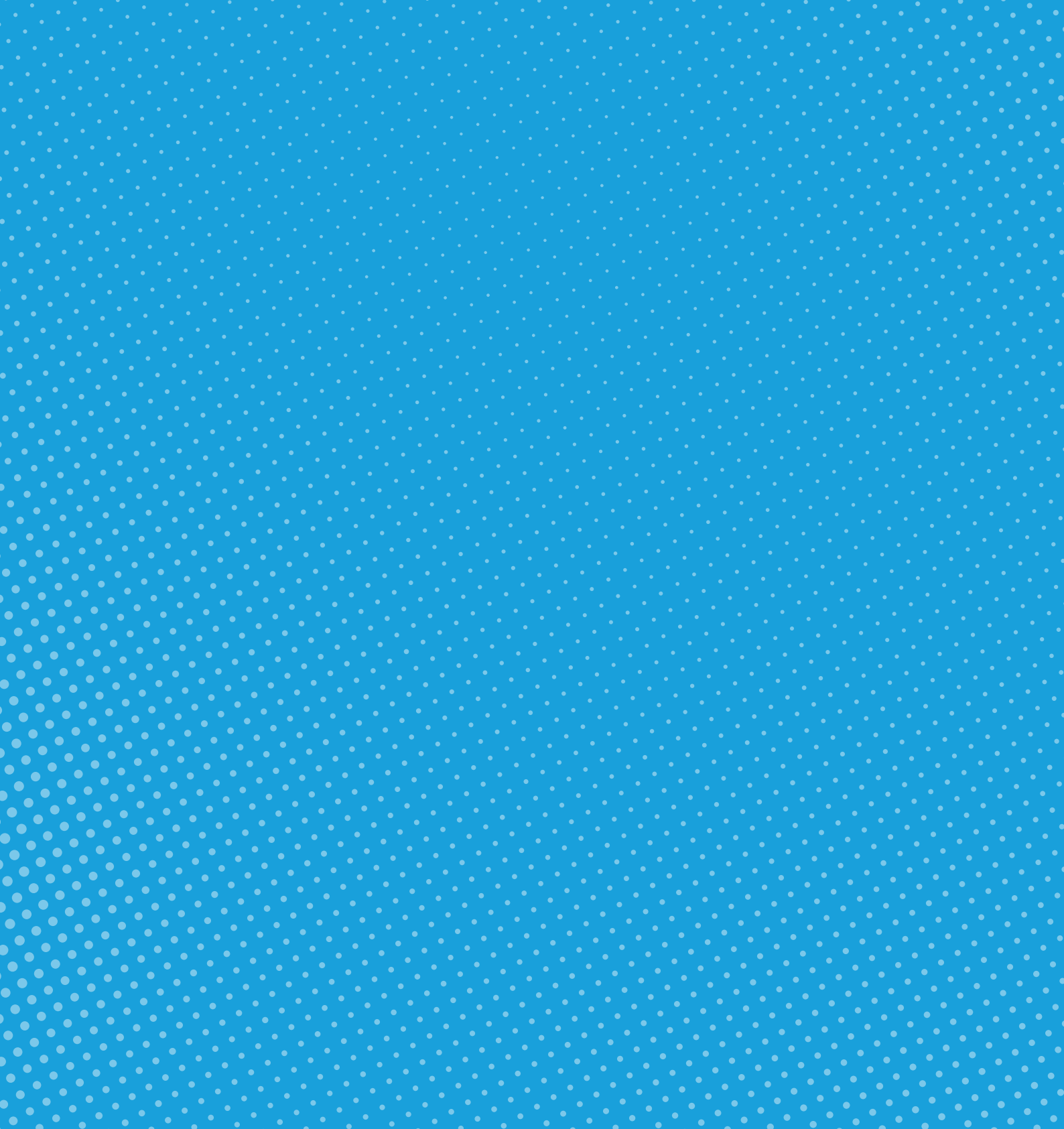
Impact story 4: Women unite to support their own (WPPL)



Senator Botoe Kanneh / UN Women Liberia

Women's CSOs, such as Paramount Young Women Initiative (PAYOWI), the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) and the Organization for Women and Children (OWORCH), along with grass-roots networks (peace huts), AWLN-Liberia and national elections observer groups, rallied in Gbarpolu county following reports of heightened VAW during the December 2020 senate elections, including the kidnapping of an independent female. The candidate was rescued and the groups continued to work together during and

after the election and by joining forces were able to hold the electoral administrator and leaders accountable for electoral malpractice and demand that they hold a partial re-run of the election in the county. The case eventually reached the Supreme Court, which declared the female candidate the winner. This incident shows the power that can be exerted by women's groups when they work together on issues of common concern to women in Liberia, perhaps reigniting the women's movement, which in recent years had become fragmented.



Canada



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls

Initiated by the European Union and the United Nations:



Sweden
Sverige



UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



UN Women Liberia Country Office

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