

UN WOMEN LIBERIA

NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2021



HEADLINES

- UN Liberia hosts panel discussions on violence against women and girls
- Nobody should compromise rape cases
- I now know how to be a leader
- Traditional practitioners embark on alternative economic livelihood programs

FOREWORD

Welcome to the UN Women Liberia newsletter for 2021. This newsletter highlights UN Women Liberia's contribution to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women.

We adapted to new ways of working due to the COVID-19 pandemic and we have made several gains despite the constraints.

We commend the Government of Liberia for making commitments on two Generation Equality Action Coalitions – one on Gender-Based Violence and one on Economic Justice and Rights.

The Generation Equality Forum was convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France, in March and June–July, respectively, with the leadership and partnership of civil society and youth organizations. Overall, many governments and civil society organizations made *bold gender equality commitments, including \$40 billion of committed investments.*

The hosting of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) side event, which was held in Liberia for the first time due to the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, is another highlight for the year. The CSW was held under the national theme, "The Liberian experience: Women sharing experiences on innovative ways of addressing violence against women and girls in achieving gender equality." The event presented an opportunity to monitor and review the progress made and assess challenges that remain in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women.

We also supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to host a series of events that were lined up to commemorate the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign.

We remain committed to working in collaboration with the Government of Liberia and partner organizations to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic; eliminate gender-based violence and to ensure that the needs of women and girls in Liberia are not left behind.

MARIE GORETH NIZIGAMA

Representative, UN Women Liberia



Marie Goreth Nizigama,
UN Women Liberia Country Representative

We commend our excellent partnership with the Government of Liberia through several line ministries that include the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Labour and key government agencies as well as development partners, civil society organizations, women's groups, traditional leaders, other UN agencies and our beneficiaries.

We thank all our donors, including the Embassies of Canada, Ireland, Norway and Sweden; the European Union and the Peacebuilding Fund, among others, for the unwavering support. *Through the support of our donors, the lives of women and girls in Liberia are being transformed tremendously.*

To update you on our key interventions, we share stories about how our beneficiaries have benefited from our interventions in the areas of women's economic empowerment, women peace and security, women's political participation and leadership, and ending violence against women and girls.

Happy reading!

“THERE IS NEED TO COLLECTIVELY AND INDIVIDUALLY CONTRIBUTE TO ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE” SAYS NIELS SCOTT, UN LIBERIA RESIDENT COORDINATOR

The United Nations joined the Government and people of Liberia to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence which kicked off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and ended on 10 December, Human Rights Day.

The global theme for this year’s campaign was “Orange the World: End Violence against Women Now!” The national theme was, “Enough is enough; Let’s act now to end violence against women, girls, children and other marginalized groups.”

Speaking at the official launch ceremony for the 16 days campaign held in Margibi County, Liberia, Mr. Niels Scott, the United Nations Resident Coor-

ordinator for Liberia noted that while some gains had been made in eliminating all forms of violence and harmful practices through programmes such as the European Union, United Nations and Government of Liberia Spotlight Initiative, and the sexual and gender-based violence program previously funded by the Embassy of Sweden, there is a lot more that still needs to be done.

Mr. Scott cited statistics from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection which show that cases of gender-based violence increased alarmingly in 2020 with more than 2240 cases being reported.

“There is need for us to collectively and individually contribute to ending gender-based violence and

bring the number of cases down,” says Mr. Scott. “There is need to strengthen primary prevention efforts and redefine power relations that have often put women and girls in a vulnerable situation at family, community, and institutional levels,” he says.

Mr. Niels recommitted the United Nations efforts to support the Government of Liberia in the fight against gender-based violence. He emphasized that the United Nations would continue to provide support and work with partners to end all forms of violence in Liberia.

The keynote speaker, Honourable, Mawine Diggs, Minister of Commerce and Industry delivered a powerful speech and challenged everyone to question themselves what they have done to fight this societal plague at the individual level.

“I call upon all Liberians and foreigners in Liberia to end violence now. “We must work together and end gender-based violence now. Issues of violence can no longer be handled the family way...Victims must be heard, and perpetrators must be held accountable, she said.

The Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia, Urban Sjöström who spoke on behalf of the Embassies of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, France, Sweden and the European Union; urged the government to fulfill all commitments made including scaling up survivor centred, comprehensive response to gender-based violence that includes prevention, psychosocial support for survivors, medical assistance, access to justice and rehabilitation programs for survivors, among other things.

Other speakers included Honourable Hassan Karney the Acting Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection who highlighted that stopping violence starts with believing survivors. He emphasized the need to end all forms violence against women and girls now.

Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Country Representative for Liberia also attended the official launch ceremony.

The United Nations in Liberia supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to host a series of events that were lined up to commemorate the 16 days of activism campaign.



Launch of 16 Days campaign. L – R, Niels Scott, UN Resident Coordinator, Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative and Urban Sjöström, Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia



March for the launch of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence in Liberia



Hon. Mawine Diggs, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Deputy Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Alice Johnson Howard at the launch of the 16 Days campaign in Margibi County



Niels Scott, UN Resident Coordinator for Liberia

UN LIBERIA HOSTS PANEL DISCUSSIONS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN LIBERIA

In commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, the United Nations in Liberia hosted panel discussions on harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and violence against women in elections in Liberia. The panel discussions were held at the UN building on Friday, 26 November 2021.

Panelists comprising of Tamba Johnson, Chairperson of the National female genital mutilation working group; Setta Fofana Saah, Coordinator of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (NACCEL) and a survivor's mother facilitated discussions on female genital mutilation while Counsellor Gloria Musu Scott, former Chief Justice and Chair of the Constitutional Review Committee; and Senator Botoe Kanneh from Gbarpolu County facilitated the panel discussion on ending violence against women in elections in Liberia.

Female genital mutilation is a harmful practice that involves the removal or injury of external female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is a violation of women's human rights and can have devastating health consequences, including haemorrhaging, infection, chronic pain, childbirth complications and, in severe cases, death. An estimated 50 per cent of women and girls in Liberia aged between 15 and 49 years have undergone female genital mutila-

tion, which is practiced in 11 out of the 15 counties in Liberia.

Efforts are being made to eliminate female genital mutilation in Liberia by providing traditional practitioners with alternative sources of income through the European Union, United Nations and Government of Liberia Spotlight Initiative, which aims to eliminate all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls.

Violence against women in elections and politics is another form of violence against women. It causes many women to shun politics and it deters them from participating and contesting in elections.

Anecdotal evidence shows that violence against women in elections is increasing in Liberia and this was documented in the 2017 election observation report. Other instances where violence against women in elections were reported include the 2019 by-elections and the 2020 special senatorial elections and referendum.

Sharing her experience, Senator Botoe Kanneh said; "Getting into politics is a big challenge for women. We are given so many names. It's either you are a prostitute, or you are this or that. They call you so many names and that is violence against women."



Panelists for the discussion on female genital mutilation



Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative



Ghoma Karloweah, Acting Head of Programs, UN Women Liberia

The sentiments were echoed by Councillor Scott who highlighted that female candidates are often asked many questions such as, "Is she married? Does she have children? If she has children, they will ask how many fathers, fathered the children. Some of these questions are asked by women. They link everything to prostitution. They will ask if she is educated. These questions are never asked about men. Unfortunately, there are no police reports that show what transpired when women experience violence."

Mr. Niels Scott, the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Liberia, Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women

Liberia Country Representative and other members of the United Nations Country Team in Liberia attended the panel discussion and reiterated the commitment of the United Nations in working with the government, civil society and partners to ending all forms of violence against women and girls in Liberia.

Furthermore, Mr. Kaman Weah, the President of the Federation of the United Nations Staff Association in Liberia (FUNSAL), led the UN staff to make commitments to ending gender-based violence in Liberia in line with its zero-tolerance policy to gender based violence.



Panelists for the discussion on violence against women in elections



Niels Scott, UN Resident Coordinator for Liberia



Kaman Weah, President of the Federation of the United Nations Staff Association in Liberia



SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE HELPING TO TRANSFORM LIVES OF TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONERS IN LIBERIA

The lives of traditional practitioners in Vezela, Lofa County, northern Liberia, are transforming because of economic empowerment projects being implemented with funding support from the European Union and United Nations Spotlight Initiative. Projects include climate smart agriculture, business management, and village savings and loan associations.

Female traditional practitioners used to struggle for financial support to do business and send their children to school. But now they can because of the loans they are accessing from the village savings and loan schemes implemented in the community. Some practitioners have started businesses and are buying and selling various goods. Some have managed to expand their farming businesses, while some have even built houses from the proceeds of various business ventures.

“The training on agriculture and financial management has helped me to change my life. I can now afford to take my children to school,” testified a beneficiary.

The economic empowerment activities aim to provide alternative means of livelihoods for traditional

practitioners and equip them with new skills and sources of income to replace the money earned by practising female genital mutilation (FGM). The activities were launched in Grand Cape Mount in December 2019, the first of five counties targeted by the Spotlight Initiative. Other counties are Nimba, Lofa, Grand Gedeh and Montserrado.

“Ever since we went to Grand Cape Mount for the launch, we have not practised FGM,” said Jaso Nyong, a traditional practitioner.

“We realized that FGM is not good for our girl children and we have stopped it. But we also realized that not all activities are bad. Some are good and the good ones should be upheld,” she said.

Her Excellency, the former Ambassador of Sweden, Ingrid Wetterqvist, told the practitioners that culture is a real asset for Liberia. She told the traditional practitioners that they could keep the good practices of their culture and leave the bad part: *“We respect your culture, and we don’t want to change it. You are custodians of culture but there is a lot of suffering associated with FGM,”* she said. Amba-

sador Wetterqvist visited traditional practitioners in Vezela, along with Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative and Alice Johnson Howard, Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

Setta Fofana Saah and Damaula Nuee from the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia were among the traditional practitioners that received the delegation and confirmed that traditional practitioners were prepared to abandon FGM.

Ms. Nizigama was happy with the progress and commitment being made to eliminate FGM. She attributed the progress to the engagement and

collaboration with the Liberian Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia, and the Liberian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

She urged the female traditional practitioners to work together with men, side by side to achieve gender equality.

The Spotlight Initiative aims to eliminate violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as FGM.



Traditional practitioners in Vezela welcomes visiting delegation

“IT WAS UNHEARD OF, THAT A TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONER COULD WRITE HIS OR HER NAME”

Sally Kromah, 39, from Grand Cape Mount County, is one of many traditional practitioners who have been practising Sande Society activities including female genital mutilation (FGM) for more than 10 years. But, she is now benefiting from the alternative economic livelihood programme being implemented to eliminate FGM in Liberia.

Ms. Kromah told a high-level delegation that she has since stopped practising [FGM] after their leader, Yatta Fahnbulleh, requested them to stop the practice. The delegation comprised Theodorus Kaspers, Head of Cooperation for the European Union Delegation in Liberia; Ingrid Wetterqvist, former Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia Alice Johnson Howard, Deputy Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative.

Ms. Kromah is now focusing on agricultural activities and other business ventures after being trained

in agriculture, business skills, adult literacy and village saving schemes, which were implemented with support from the European Union – United Nations Spotlight Initiative.

“[The programme] taught us how to write and spell our names. They also taught us how to make gardens. We managed to harvest some corn and raised \$20,000 [Liberian dollars], which contributed to our village savings and loan scheme.

“I am happy that I can now spell my name and my business has also grown. Previously, it was unheard of for a traditional practitioner to be able to write their name, but now, we can.

“I used to get L\$500 from the ‘bush business’ but now I can raise between L\$2000 and L\$3000. I am now able to pay school fees for my children,” explained Ms. Kromah.

Other beneficiaries were also grateful for the support, citing that they were not able to plant bananas before the programme was introduced, but now they can. They also now know how to multiply their money. *“We are ready for the economic empowerment programme. If I get L\$10, I now know how to make it L\$30. Before the empowerment programme, I used to spend all the money,”* said a beneficiary of the programme.

Another beneficiary is also grateful that she was taught how to do business and save money. Her business has expanded and is now able to pay school fees for her children and share responsibilities with her husband.

The traditional practitioners highlighted that they have accepted that they will no longer practice FGM, but they want their economic empowerment activities to be sustained.

Theodorus Kaspers told the traditional practitioners that culture is not static, and that it can change. He acknowledged that there are good things in every culture, but people must be able to make their own choices.

He urged traditional practitioners in Grand Cape Mount County to be ambassadors of the Spotlight Initiative and show how they are spending the money being received. This will help support and justify the programme so that it becomes easy to extend to other counties.

FGM is still practised in 11 out of the 15 counties in Liberia. Currently, five counties are receiving support from the Spotlight Initiative and there are six remaining counties without support.

The delegation also toured the construction site of the vocational and heritage centre, which, when finished, will serve as a dedicated learning centre for traditional practitioners and the community.

Here, they will learn new skills to enable them to gain an alternative source of income to replace the money they earned from practising FGM.

Other vocational and heritage centres will be built in Nimba, Lofa and Montserrado counties, with support from the Spotlight Initiative.

The Spotlight Initiative aims to eliminate violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as FGM.



Theodorus Kaspers, Head of Cooperation for the European Union Delegation in Liberia



Sally Kromah, traditional practitioner from Grand Cape Mount County



The multi-purpose centre in Grand Cape Mount County

FROM WHERE I STAND: “EMPOWER TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONERS TO ELIMINATE FGM”

Piaseh Oretha Gonsahn is a traditional practitioner from Nimba County, in north-eastern Liberia. She is one of the traditional practitioners in her county who has stopped female genital mutilation (FGM) after the launch of an economic livelihood programme in December 2019, which is benefiting about 300 other traditional practitioners in Liberia.

“We were constantly harassed by people who called us ‘devils’ because they associated traditional practitioners and our Sande Society* activities with bad things. Because of this perception from the community, it was difficult for us to get any meaningful opportunities to do productive things. It limited our chances of participating in project activities in the community.

The launch of the alternative economic livelihood program brought relief to traditional practitioners (Zoes), because we were encouraged to participate in the programmes to learn new skills that enabled us to start alternative livelihood activities and stop practising FGM.

FGM is a harmful practice that involves the removal or injury of external female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM has now been stopped in Nimba County. This can be attributed to the interventions of the UN Women in collaboration with Plan International under the European Union and United Nations Spotlight Initiative that launched the alternative economic livelihood programme.

The programme teaches new skills – such as climate smart agriculture and business management – to traditional practitioners who used to practice FGM. This allows them to get an alternative source of in-

come to replace the money they used to make from practising FGM.

As Zoes, we have never seen this kind of help before from Plan International and UN Women. We thank God for the help they are giving us to be able to learn something that will help us to take care of ourselves and our children so we can stop [FGM] since people say it is harmful.

The alternative economic livelihood programme has benefited me and my family because I am no longer borrowing money from other people. I can now lend money to other people as a business opportunity. I am into soap-making and I can support my family through the business.

To eliminate FGM in Liberia, there is a need to economically empower traditional practitioners so that they refrain from the practice and focus on other economic activities like farming.

There is also a need to educate people about FGM. FGM started a long time ago and people need to be educated on why it should be stopped.”

In December 2019, UN Women, in collaboration with Plan International, launched the alternative economic livelihood programme and broke ground for a vocational and heritage centre, in Grand Cape Mount County, northern Liberia, with support from the Spotlight Initiative.

* *Sande Society activities are those where young women and girls are initiated into adulthood through a series of activities, including FGM.*



Piaseh Oretha Gonsahn is a traditional practitioner from Nimba County

TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONERS EMBARK ON ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS IN LIBERIA

In Liberia, some traditional practitioners of female genital mutilation (FGM) are now leaving the practice and opting to embark on alternative economic livelihood programmes such as climate smart agriculture and business management.

FGM is a harmful practice that involves the removal or injury of external female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is a violation of women’s human rights and can have devastating health consequences, including haemorrhaging, infection, chronic pain, childbirth complications and, in severe cases, death. FGM was performed for financial and cultural reasons.

Kema Dahn from Nimba County, north-eastern Liberia, is one of the traditional practitioners who used to perform Sande Society activities, where young women and girls are initiated into adulthood through a series of activities including FGM. However, she has since stopped the practice and is now focusing on agricultural activities and other business ventures after training in climate smart agriculture, business development, literacy, and village savings and loans associations. The programmes were facilitated by Plan International, in collaboration with UN Women, under the European Union and United Nations Spotlight Initiative.

“We used to teach the girls how to behave in the presence of older people, plaiting hair and being modest, but we are no longer practising FGM because we realized that it is not necessary. We are now focusing on agriculture and business activities,” said Ms. Dahn about the Sande Society.

Ms. Dahn is grateful to be a beneficiary of the alternative economic livelihood programme, because she received training on agriculture and business development.

“The training really helped me a lot because we did not know much about business, but I now understand the meaning of business. I never knew much about farming, but I have acquired new knowledge and skills to do farming. I also learned how to manage a small business. I have this information in my heart. If I sell a bag of salt, I now know what I am getting from it.

“The new skills in business development and management provided a great opportunity for me to get another source of income other than that earned through FGM,” said Ms. Dahn.

Ms Dahn believes that the alternative economic livelihood programme provides an opportunity to transition from FGM activities to economic empowerment benefits for traditional practitioners.

She believes that, if traditional practitioners are empowered economically to start their own businesses, they will stop practising FGM in Liberia.

“What will make us leave these traditional things is empowerment to start our own businesses,” Ms. Dahn said.

Ms. Dahn, 54, has five children and seven grandchildren. As one of 300 traditional practitioners who has benefitted from the alternative economic livelihood programme, Ms. Dahn has started farming. Launched in December 2019, the programme aims to provide traditional practitioners with new skills and sources of income to replace money earned through FGM in five Liberian counties targeted by the Spotlight Initiative. The programme was initiated by UN Women in collaboration with Plan International under the Spotlight Initiative.

Providing alternative economic activities for traditional practitioners is intended to persuade them to abandon harmful practices, such as FGM, and instead engage in activities that will empower them and build and sustain positive cultural heritage.



Kema Dahn, traditional practitioner from Nimba County

LET US UNITE TO ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN LIBERIA

The twenty-fifth of every month is “Orange Day” – a day to raise awareness and take action to end violence against women and girls across the world, as proclaimed by the United Nations Secretary-General’s UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign.

Orange Day calls upon activists, governments and United Nations partners to mobilize people and highlight issues that can help prevent and end violence against women and girls. The day seeks to increase awareness every month, not just on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.



Orange Day in May and June was themed “prevent”. Advocacy efforts focused on strategies to prevent violence against women and girls. The day was observed in line with the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence.

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human

rights violations in the world. Efforts to end violence and to enhance the commitments from governments, civil society, community members and individuals need to be intensified.

In Liberia, cases of violence against women and girls increased alarmingly in the past year, despite efforts by various stakeholders to combat it. The increase has been mainly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection 2020 report, 2,240 cases of sexual or gender-based violence were reported. Rape accounted for 80 per cent of these cases. The high case numbers prompted the President of Liberia, Dr George Manneh Weah, to declare rape a national emergency, in line with the Anti-Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Roadmap 2020–2022, developed by the Government of Liberia and Partners.

Sexual and gender-based violence is one form of violence against women and girls. Eliminating it is pivotal to achieving gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, and for empowering women. Other forms of violence include domestic violence, physical violence, and emotional or psychological violence.

To support the efforts of the Government of Liberia in addressing violence against women and girls, UN Women has been raising awareness by sharing information on its social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter.

“We encourage everyone to join us to share the information, so that we unite to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in Liberia,” says Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative. *“We call upon everyone to intensify efforts to end a culture of violence against women and girls and make Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence their responsibility.”*

Generation Equality Action Coalitions are poised to deliver concrete results on gender equality to advance the Sustainable Development Agenda.

GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA COMMIT TO TWO GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM ACTION COALITIONS



The Government of Liberia committed to two Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions: one for Gender-Based Violence, and another for Economic Justice and Rights.

The Generation Equality Forum is a global gathering for gender equality. UN Women convened the forum, which was co-hosted by the governments of Mexico (in March 2021) and France (in June–July 2021), with the leadership and partnership of civil society and youth. Many governments and civil society organizations made bold gender equality commitments, including \$40 billion of investments and the launch of a global 5-year action journey to accelerate achieving gender equality by 2026. Action Coalitions are global, innovative, multi-stakeholder partnerships that are mobilizing governments, civil society, international organizations and the private sector to:

- Catalyse collective action
- Spark global and local conversations among different generations
- Drive increased public and private investment
- Deliver concrete, game-changing results for women and society in general

The selected themes of the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions are:

- Gender-based violence
- Economic justice and rights
- Bodily autonomy, and sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Feminist action for climate justice
- Technology and innovation for gender equality

The Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights aims to expand work in formal and informal economies to reduce the number of working women living in poverty.

The Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence will implement concrete commitments to address violence against women and girls in all their diversity.

WHY DID LIBERIA COMMIT TO ACTING ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

Liberia has been experiencing escalating numbers of cases of sexual and gender-based violence, and increasing prevalence of harmful traditional practices (HTPs). HTPs include child marriages and female genital mutilation. This has hampered the gains being made in the socio-economic and political life of the country after the civil crisis. There have been large efforts to prevent, and respond to the increase in violence against women and girls, but the situation remains unchanged, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. There appears to be some acceptance of violence as an integral part of gender relations and the culture of impunity, and some view gender-based violence as “normal”. Institutional and legal services that support survivors is inadequate – or non-existent – in most parts of the country. Survivors do not usually see justice and, if they do, punishment of the perpetrators is minimal.

Therefore, all players need to ensure that states implement and finance evidence-driven laws, policies and action plans to:

- End violence against women and girls in all their diversity
- Implement and finance prevention strategies to drive down the prevalence of gender-based violence
- Scale-up comprehensive, accessible and quality services for survivors of gender-based violence and enhance support
- Increase flexible funding from states, private sectors, foundations and other donors towards ending gender-based violence against women and girls in all their diversity.



L – R - The President of France, Emmanuel Macron; the President of Liberia, Dr George Manneh Weah; First lady of Liberia, Clar Weah and former Executive Director of UN Women, Dr Phumzile Ngcuka at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris, France. Photo credit - Executive Mansion Liberia



Kebbeh Monger, president of the National Rural Women Structure of Liberia

“AS WOMEN LEADERS, WE CAN CHANGE LIBERIA”

Kebbeh Monger is the President of the National Rural Women Structure of Liberia, a grassroots organization championing women’s economic empowerment in rural Liberia. Since her election in 2008, she has contributed immensely to transforming women’s lives in various communities.

Under Ms. Monger’s leadership, women who did not have any vocational skills were empowered to develop skills in, for example, tailoring, climate smart agriculture, business and adult literacy.

“I feel proud when I see women who were unable to write, being able to write. I feel proud when I see women making their own clothes, yet they were not able to sew before they joined the rural women structure. I am proud that rural women can make their own money and be able to make savings,” says Ms. Monger.

As the President of the National Rural Women Structure of Liberia, Ms. Monger has established offices and created a membership database. Her organization has also empowered rural women through various initiatives that include training in business skills and agriculture. UN Women has supported these various initiatives.

On a 100-acre farm in Passama, Lofa County, northern Liberia, 150 women are producing various crops that

enables them to feed people in Liberia. The women are also planning to construct a community grain reserve, which is also supported by UN Women.

“When you are a leader, you have to show love and concern to the plight of the people. You must listen and be able to involve people in decision-making. Networking, sharing information and being creative is very important,” affirms Ms. Monger.

Ms. Monger believes that it is important for women to be leaders: “Women have focus and they have vision. They want the best for the communities and people that they lead. Women are always making changes.”

When COVID-19 started to affect the country, Ms. Monger participated in radio talk shows to raise awareness about the virus. She encouraged rural women to protect themselves and to take precautionary measures so they would avoid being infected with the virus. UN Women supported her initiatives by providing personal hygiene products, and helped to train women to make soap and food products processed from local cereals.

Ms. Monger’s message to young people is that they should not be afraid to reach out to elderly leaders so that they learn from them and become able to take over.

“What keeps me strong as a leader is the love that the women are giving me, the unity and bond we have created and the changes in their lives. I want to see the lives of women changing,” explains Ms. Monger. Ms. Monger, 67, is from Lofa County in northern Liberia. She has eight children – two girls and six boys. She also has five grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

“NOBODY SHOULD COMPROMISE ON RAPE CASES”

Anne Nushan, 63, is the national Chairperson of the Peace Huts of Liberia. She won the 2019 United Nations Population Award in New York, as well as the USAID-sponsored best civil society organization in Liberia for 2020.

As a rural woman, Ms. Nushan was inspired by her grassroots background to establish Peace Huts with support from UN Women. Peace Huts are community centres that women use for conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. The first Peace Hut was established in Totota, Bong County, on 26 February 2007. There are currently 37 Peace Huts in all 15 Liberian counties.

“As a woman from the grassroots, I felt that I should be able to advocate for women from a similar background. I feel that I have power to defend my people and other women are supporting me,” she says.

Ms. Nushan explains: *“After the war, I realized that there was a lot of violence against women. I decided to help people in the community. People had trust in me because every time they had issues, they would come to me. Every time they came with problems, we would sit down, discuss and make peace. That encouraged me to start the Peace Hut because I felt that it was going to help the poor people that need it, especially women. I felt that women did not have money to go to the courts. That’s why I decided to establish Peace Huts.”*

WHAT ISSUES ARE YOU ADDRESSING IN THE COMMUNITY?

Ms. Nushan highlights that there were many issues of domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape in the community. When she stepped in to help, she would report the cases to the police and take survivors to the hospital. There were a lot of issues being reported, including men abandoning their children.

The major issues that need to be addressed in rural communities include teenage pregnancy and early-marriage.

A lot of mothers think that if their girls go on the streets, they can earn money and will be able to support the family. I always tell them that if the

children go to school and learn, they will be able to support them. Most of the girls are school drop-outs. So when they are not in school, they get married early.

To resolve these challenges, women from the Peace Hut decided to start creating awareness to see how we could help girls understand the importance of getting an education.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE TO YOUNG PEOPLE?

My advice to young people is that they should get educated. If you are not educated you will not be able to support your parents. If you learn to be responsible, you will be able to take care of yourself tomorrow. Don’t rush to do things – focus on your education so that you become a responsible person.

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE DO TO HELP RESOLVE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

I feel sad when I hear about rape issues in Liberia. We conduct a lot of awareness. But instead of getting better, the situation is getting worse and I think it is complete wickedness. I once heard of an incident where a father raped his daughter, and the mother asked the girl not to tell anyone because she feared that it will shame the father. When the story came out, the father ran away, but the girl is now pregnant.

Mothers can help protect their girls. They should not allow their children out in the streets alone because they are risking their lives. If 12–13-year-old children are in streets, men will think they are now grown-up women because they have breasts.

HOW CAN MEN HELP TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION?

Men need to be responsible and stop perpetrating sexual and gender-based violence. Most of the perpetrators are men. A responsible person will not behave this way and destroy a child’s life. It is criminal and wicked to rape. I appeal to my fellow women to stand up for children, because they are important. We should all report perpetrators to the police. We should also help to raise awareness so that people understand that rape is a crime.

WHAT HAPPENS AT PEACE HUTS?

Women carry out mediation and settle cases. If we cannot solve a problem, we take it to the police, which is why we work together with the police. We follow cases and make sure that they are taken to the court. When a case goes to court, we make sure that it is investigated.

After mediation, we also monitor survivors in the community to ensure there is peace. We also solve issues of sexual and gender-based violence and men abandoning their children.

WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE WITH PEOPLE?

Children have a right to live as children and not be destroyed. Nobody should compromise on rape cases.

UN Women has been supporting women to set up Peace Huts to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding and to empower them economically. UN Women has supported women from the Peace Huts with leadership training, capacity-building, vocational skills training and economic empowerment, including creating village savings and loan associations.



Anne Nushan, National Chairperson of the Peace Huts of Liberia

“I NOW KNOW HOW TO BE A LEADER” – BENEFICIARIES OF THE KONIA PEACE HUT SHARE THEIR STORIES

On the twentieth day of every month, members of the Konia Peace Hut meet for an educational session on women and children's rights, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The sessions are facilitated by Mama Tarnue, Chairperson of the Konia Peace Hut, a centre in Lofa County, northern Liberia, which was established to assist rural women with conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

“I educate fellow women about women and children's rights. If women know their rights, men will not beat them. We conduct awareness campaigns on rape and peace in the community. We teach community members how to report rape cases. We also teach them how to handle cases of gender-based violence”, says Ms. Tarnue.

Ms. Tarnue confirmed that the number of rape cases have decreased in the surrounding towns because of the interventions of women from the Konia Peace Hut.

“We provide counselling services in the community and many people are benefiting from the service. We are helping to bring peace in the community. We encourage women to participate in various ac-

tivities, including activities that men are doing, so that they are not left behind”, she says.

Women from the Konia Peace Hut have also benefited from economic empowerment livelihood programmes, vocational and leadership training programmes. The Peace Hut has transformed the lives of many rural women in Konia through counselling sessions and various initiatives.

As a result of the training sessions on leadership, many women from the Peace Hut are taking steps to become a future leader. “I now know how to be a leader. My ambition is to represent women's and children's rights at the higher level”, says Ms. Tarnue.

“I am grateful to UN Women because I have learnt a lot of things about women's rights and also about 1325¹”, she says.

The Konia Peace Hut is one of the Peace Huts supported by UN Women. The Peace Huts help to empower rural women to participate in various economic, leadership and vocational training programmes, such as adult literacy, and village savings and loan associations (VLSAs). The Swedish Embassy has been providing funding support.

Beneficiaries of the Konia Peace Hut share experiences of how the Peace Hut has helped them to transform their lives through counselling sessions and through economic empowerment initiatives such as the VLSAs.

“I am happy that I managed to build my house and started a small business from proceeds I received from the VLSA”, said Kebeh Mulbah, Chairperson of the VLSA for Konia.

Other beneficiaries testified of how they managed to expand their agricultural projects. Others were grateful for the support they got through the Konia Peace Hut because they are now leading peaceful lives.

“Before coming to the Peace Hut, I was always troubled. I would cry all the time because I did not know where I would get assistance. I was worried that my children would not go to school. But ever since I started coming to the Peace Hut, I feel free and happy. I took part in the business skills training. I do not feel troubled anymore because I can now make my own money. The Peace Hut has given me hope,” says Younger Gayfar, 50, a member of the Konia Peace Hut, whose husband died during the war.



Mama Tarnue, Chairperson of the Konia Peace Hut

¹ The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction.

IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS IN PASSAMA, LOFA COUNTY

In Passama, Lofa County, northern Liberia, UN Women is supporting the National Rural Women's Structure to implement various economic empowerment projects. Such projects include climate smart agriculture, village savings and loan associations, and vocational training programmes such as adult literacy and tailoring. The Government of Sweden helped fund these programmes.

"I was unable to hold a pen or to write my name but I can now write my name. I can also count numbers such as one, two, three ... Now that I can write, I can also assist my children to write," said Gbolu Nohr, a beneficiary of the programme.

"Every time I went to the clinic, I would be the first to arrive and be given a card with number one written on it, to show that I should be the first to be served. But because I could not read, I would remain seated and not be served when it was time, because I could not read. Now that I have learned how to read and write, I will be served when it is my turn and no one will tell me that I don't know that I am number one. I am also now able to assist my son with his school-work," said Deddeh Kenedy, 35, another beneficiary of the adult literacy program.

Deddeh Koboi, 40, and Nyamah Paye, 39, used to walk for more than two hours and 30 minutes to look for tailors to make clothes and uniforms for their children. But, after the vocational skills training programme in tailoring and a donation of sewing machines, the women are no longer walking long distances. They can now make clothes on their own after learning how to sew. They are now generating some income from tailoring and are able to feed their families and pay fees for their children. The sewing machines were donated by the UN Women, with support from the Swedish Embassy.

Former Ambassador of Sweden to Liberia Ingrid Wetterqvist said she was grateful that she saw the projects firsthand. She can now go back home and tell them how Sweden's money is helping the women of Liberia. She noted the women were changing their lifestyles because of the support they are receiving and that makes her happy.

Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative, said she was confident that the rural women will be able to feed all of Liberia because of their learned skills in farming.



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



Participants at one of the mock Parliament sessions in Liberia

UN WOMEN SUPPORTS THE MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION TO HOST MOCK PARLIAMENT SESSIONS IN FIVE COUNTIES IN LIBERIA

Stakeholders from 15 counties in Liberia took part in mock Parliament sessions held in the Liberian counties of Grand Bassa, Margibi, Bomi, Nimba and Grand Gedeh, 12–31 August 2021.

County leaders, academics, Parliamentarians, political party leaders, representatives of civil society organizations and members of the judiciary system were among those who attended the sessions.

The mock parliament sessions aimed to promote and strengthen collaboration mechanisms and advocate to have more women involved in politics. The Liberian election law will enforce a 30 per cent gender quota, which will make it mandatory for political parties to adhere to the 30 per cent quota for women.

The mock sessions also provided an opportunity for people at the grassroots level – including women and youth – as well as community leaders to have insights on the need and benefits of having more women in decision-making positions, but also the importance to know how bills are debated in parliament.

"We hope that, by bringing the parliament to the people, communities are provided with a platform to understand how their recommendations for legal reforms are translated into law by their representa-

tives," said Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative.

In Liberia, women make up half of the population, but they are grossly underrepresented in politics, as evidenced by the number of seats that they occupy in the legislature. Currently, eight women out of 73 members are in the House of Representatives, while only two women are among the 30 Liberian Senators.

"It also gives [people] a chance to understand how the lawmakers prioritize and present their need for a critical mass of women in politics, and advocate to enforce the 30 per cent gender quota in the elections law," said Ms. Nizigama.

However, to increase the number of women in politics and decision-making positions, Liberia has committed to take action to increase women's political participation and representation by signing and ratifying several international and regional human rights instruments. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; the African Charter on Human and People's Rights; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights of Women in Africa; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections

and Governance; and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

Despite the commitments made, the Government of Liberia is working to bridge the gaps that still exist, with support from UN Women.

“As the Ministry responsible for the women’s empowerment, we are delighted to partner with the Women’s Legislative Caucus of Liberia, WONGOSOL, the National Elections Commission and women at

the grassroots level to bring a spotlight on the importance of empowering women to participate in politics and leadership positions,” said the Hon. Williametta Saydee-Tarr, Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection.

UN Women provided technical support to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and other partners, to host mock parliament sessions. The Government of Canada provided funding support.



Miatta Darwolor, Founder and Executive Director of Sister Aid Liberia



Participants at one of the mock Parliament sessions in Liberia

FROM WHERE I STAND: “IT IS EVERYBODY’S RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE ACTION”

Miatta Darwolor is the Founder and Executive Director of Sister Aid Liberia, a women-led non-governmental organization that promotes young women’s and girls’ rights in political participation and leadership, works to prevent violence against women and girls, and advocates for women-friendly policies and laws.

“I grew up in a poor family that was deeply rooted in tradition. Some of my sisters and aunts were members of the ‘Sande Society’, where female genital mutilation (FGM) is practised. Fortunately, I escaped the initiation – but that also meant I faced discrimination.

I depended on scholarship programmes to attend school. When I was in high school, I managed to support my mother to go to school with my income from part-time work. Her education opened her up to discussions on gender equality within our family; we agreed as a family to respect and value the rights of girls and boys equally.

Since then, I have worked with several women’s organizations to raise awareness on women’s rights and the health implications of FGM. When I advocate for women’s rights, I am standing up for the rights of my sisters, mothers and daughters. My life experiences have strengthened my resilience and fortitude.

Through information from workshops, my family decided to never again ‘initiate’ girls through practices such as FGM. Instead, we decided to promote girls’ education. Sister Aid Liberia is now working

with other women’s organizations to push for the signing of the FGM bill into law in Liberia.

Poverty and our patriarchal system are the root causes of violence against women and girls in Liberia. If we empower women to stand up for their rights and take up leadership positions in all spheres of life, we will solve many societal issues.

There is also a need to bridge the gap between the younger and older generations. We are not in competition with each other, and we are equally relevant to the fight for gender equality in Liberia.

Advocating for gender equality should not only be the responsibility of women’s rights organizations; it is everybody’s responsibility to take action. More men need to realize that women’s rights are human rights. Men need to promote positive masculinity and discourage negative social norms, whether at home or work.”

Miatta Darwolor, 31, is a Liberian women and youth rights activist and development advocate. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Sister Aid Liberia, a women-led non-governmental organization that promotes rights advocacy and empowerment, research and policy engagements, and leadership and capacity-building, mainly targeting women and girls across the country. UN Women supported Sister Aid Liberia’s participation in training on women’s political participation, after which it expanded the training to 50 women political aspirants and civil society organizations.

FLASHBACK ON COVID-19 ACTIVITIES

UN Women has been supporting the Government of Liberia to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemics such as COVID-19 affect men and women differently. Women act as leaders in their communities and in frontline services. They bear the burden of care which increases their risk of infection and they are also mostly affected by the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. In addition, crisis such as COVID-19, put women and girls at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence as witnessed in many countries including Liberia.

UN Women worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to ensure that gender sensitive policies are put in place; the national response is gender sensitive, and the needs of women and girls are not left behind.

This section highlights some of our interventions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of its continuous effort to support the Government of Liberia to prevent the spread of COVID-19, UN Women signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MGCSP) to empower women-owned tailoring businesses affiliated to the Liberia National Tailoring Union to produce 10,000 masks to be distributed to women, girls and children in Montserrado and Margibi counties in Liberia.



Marie Goreth Nizigama, UN Women Liberia Country Representative and Honourable Williametta Saydee-Tarr, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection sign a partnership agreement for the production of masks for distribution to women, children and girls in Liberia.
Photo credit: UN Women Liberia

UN Women Liberia in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Women Legislative Caucus donated an assortment of sanitation and hygiene materials to the National Response Center to boost government efforts in response to COVID-19 in Liberia.



Mrs. Kebeh Monger, National President of the Rural Women Structure of Liberia addresses women during a COVID-19 awareness campaign.

National Rural Women Structure of Liberia raise awareness on COVID-19: With support from UN Women, the National Rural Women Structure of Liberia sensitised women in rural Liberia on measures to prevent themselves and their families from COVID-19. The National Rural Women Structure also distributed an assortment of COVID-19 prevention materials to its members. The materials included buckets, hand sanitizers, detergents and soap produced by the group with support from UN Women.

UN Women supports community awareness campaigns: Members of the Wise women group conducted awareness campaigns and distributed COVID-19 materials to community members in West Point Liberia. The Wise women group is one of the women's groups that received COVID-19 hygiene materials that were donated by UN Women to support the Government of Liberia to respond to the pandemic.



Distribution of COVID-19 materials donated by UN Women to women's groups

More than 400 women in Margibi and Nimba counties in Liberia benefitted from an assortment of materials donated by UN Women to various vulnerable and women's groups in Liberia. Women from the peace huts of Liberia were supported to distribute buckets, detergents, soap, hand sanitizers and masks, to women in need in communities. UN Women supported the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to respond to COVID-19 in Liberia.

Spotlight Initiative supported a series of trainings on gender-sensitive reporting and sexual and gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. Close to 300 media practitioners participated in the trainings which were aimed at empowering them with knowledge and skills to report in a gender sensitive manner and to have more information on how to report on SGBV in order to eliminate violence against women and girls in Liberia.





More than 180 female headed households with disabilities from 14 communities in rural Montserrado County in Liberia are now informed about measures to prevent COVID-19 pandemic and have also benefited from hygiene materials to prevent the spread of COVID-19 following a recent community outreach conducted by the Destined Kids Assistance Program (DEKAP) with support from UN Women.

The outreach was intended to raise awareness on COVID-19 for people living with disabilities. "Most families with disabilities are battling with extreme poverty, neglect and systematic marginalization and the majority cannot afford hand washing supplies to prevent the spread of COVID-19, explained Mrs. Helen Wenneh, DEKAP Executive Director.

"We are grateful to UN Women for the donation of essential hygiene supplies to ensure that disabled families and their children have access to hand washing facilities," she said.

UN Women donates a consignment of WASH and safety materials to prevent spread of COVID-19

UN Women Liberia Country representative, Marie Goreth Nizigama handed over a consignment of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Safety Materials to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection at the Ministerial Complex in Congo Town, Monrovia to support in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the country.



Government of Liberia and the Spotlight Initiative launch community engagement campaign to prevent violence against women and girls: Through the Spotlight Initiative, UN Women in collaboration with WANEP donated ten motorbikes to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia. This was done to enable traditional leaders to reach their communities and monitor the implementation of the Ganta Declaration, which calls for a one year suspension of all Sande society activities, including female genital mutilation (FGM).



UN Women supported the Liberia National Police to conduct awareness campaigns on COVID-19 and sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia. With funding from the Embassy of Sweden, UN Women supported the Liberia National Police to conduct awareness campaigns in Bomi, Bong, Margibi and Montserrado County.





UN Women is committed to work with the Liberian Government and all key partners to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and to advance the SDGs agenda in Liberia

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