

Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL)

NGO Shadow Report to 7th& 8th Periodic
Report of Liberia on Convention on the
Elimination of all forms of Discrimination
against Women (CEDAW)

Submitted to UN CEDAW Committee, Geneva, Switzerland

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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Virus
AFT	Agenda for Transformation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSOs	Civil Society organizations
EFA	Education for All
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
LNP	Liberia National Police
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
TIP	Trafficking In People
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
VAW	Violence Against Women
WONGOSOL	Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia

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¹ Cases reported in 2015 are from January to May

NGOS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE REPORT

Sharpe Home care service(SHOCAS)	United Women Development Association (UWODA)
National Empowerment Program for women and girls (NEP)	Leadership Institute for Women (LIW)
Health Page Liberia Inc.	Touching Humanity in Need of Kindness(THINK)
Kit Rehabilitation	Unique Women Organization Inc.
Virtuous Women Multipurpose Cooperative	National Association on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (NATPAH)
Women Interested in Development & Emp.(WIDE)	Community Sustainable Development Organization (COSDO)
Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI)	Community Humanitarian & advocacy development organization (COHADO)
South Eastern Women Development Association	Movement for National women Association
Young Women Christian Association	Liberia Needy women and Children Organization.(LINWCO)
Sustainable Development Action	United Women Development Association (UWODA)
Voice of the Voiceless (VOV)	Leadership Institute for Women (LIW)
Movement for National women Association	Rural Integrated Center for Community Empowerment (RICCE)
United Muslim women Advocacy and Empowerment organization	LATULU (Kissi Word for Togetherness)
Forum for the rights of women	Sustainable Organization Initiative Liberia(SOIL)
Women Solidarity Inc. (WOSI)	Restoration of Education Advancement Programs (REAP)
Loyal Women Association of Liberia (LOWAL) INC.	Bambalia Women Village Saving & Loans Association

National Women's Commission of Liberia (NAWOCOL)	Grass Root Women Development Association Inc.
Action for Communities Matters (ACOMA)	Association of Disable female international
Medical Liberia (mL)	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Key Concerns

1. Impact of the Ebola virus disease on women

The Ebola epidemic that overwhelmed Liberia in 2014 affected women in the roles as caretakers, health personnel, farmers and small traders. This situation was made worse by closure of health facilities which led to pregnant women given birth in unimaginable circumstances such as in streets and in homes in some cases without medical help. This also led to increase in maternal mortality. In times of national emergencies such as this outbreak, there was insufficient attention to ensuring that the gendered-context of healthcare is given the necessary attention. Another consequence of the Ebola pandemic was the number of orphan children that was left behind.

While we have highlighted specific conditions of women during the Ebola epidemic, it is important to point out current health condition of female Ebola survivors: Many women survivors continue to lack access to healthcare services and suffer from various medical conditions such as joints pains, blur vision, hearing problems, fever, fatigue, lack of ability to concentrate, and the list continues.

Although the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are providing support to address the many problems, it is important to note that a more cohesive and comprehensive strategy needs to be in place to deal with issues regarding health especially in times of pandemic like in the case of Ebola in 2014.

Strategic Issues:

We would like to urge the Committee to request the State Party to provide clear explanations on how they dealt with the Ebola pandemic and its consequences on women.

We also urge the Committee to request that the State to explain the steps have been put into place to ensure that a comprehensive health strategy is in place to deal with pandemic such as Ebola and whether all relevant agencies are equipped to deal with this crisis if it happens again.

We would like to urge the Committee to request for information on the status of communities and family with Ebola orphans and whether proper social re-integration is taking place.

2. Access to Justice and Legal Reform

The Liberian Constitution of 1986 is undergoing a review process and currently 23 recurring views that have been forwarded to the National Legislature for debate. Of the 23 recurring views, only six are gender-specific. Given the increased discrimination and marginalization against women, it is important that the six recurring views remain as proposed by the women' organizations are maintained.

Strategic Issues:

The six (6) issues are:

- 1. That the rights of children as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Children are respected and reflected in any amendments to the constitution.*
- 2. The Constitution should ensure women's participation in governance and national affairs as enshrined in the standards set by the CEDAW Convention*

3. *The Constitution and all legal documents should carry the pronouns 'he/she'.*
4. *Age of marriage for girl must be 18 as enshrined in the Convention of Rights of Children. Customary and religious reasons should not be used to lower this age of consent.*
5. *Women should have access to equal economic and social opportunities (employment and education).*
6. *The Constitution should guarantee inheritance rights of women and no religious or customary reasons are used to deny women their inheritance.*
7. *To what extent has Government made efforts to commence the reform process of the Liberian Judiciary?*

3. Women and Peace Security

The “Most Significant Change (MSC)” relative to women peace and security is increased in awareness on gender sensitive issues and accelerated support to the implementation of UN Resolution 1325. UN Agencies and Government of Liberia implementation of four joint programmes (JP) focusing on gender-specific themes such as the introduction of a Gender sensitive training incorporated in the Police Training Academy Curriculum. ¹Although gender sensitive training have been incorporated into the Police Training Academy’s curriculum and specialized courses have been crafted for all supervisors, staff of Gender Affairs Section, staff of Women and Children Protection Section, and Academy training staff, there is still limitation in the impact of these training in the implementation of their interaction with the public.

In regards to impact evaluation on UNSCR 1235, assessments have been carried out on the status on the implementation of the document by the Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia, even though the government through the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection commissioned an evaluation which has not been released as the ministry is still reviewing the findings.

Strategic Issues:

To what extent has Government conduct robust campaign with males’ involvement to promote women’s participation in formal conflict mitigation and peace building processes.

4. National Machinery for the Advancement of Women

In a 2014 UNDP assessment of the impact of resolution 1325 on women and girls in Liberia, it was observed that “a number of significant legal and administrative policies have been developed to address issues of women peace and security since the launched of the Liberia national plan in 2009. There is a need for more awareness and public education on violence against women so that women become more vocal and assertively exert themselves in demanding their rights.

Since the establishment of the Ministry of Gender in 2001, we believe that the resources allocated to this Ministry have been insufficient and this Ministry is constantly under-funded. For example, in 2014 budget, the Ministry of Gender was allocated an estimated of 1.4% of the total national budget.

Strategic Issues

That state party establishes a trust fund for women's empowerment and community-based campaigns to increase CBOs access to small grants for the implementation of awareness initiatives.

We urge the Committee to ask the State Party their rationale in providing such a limited budget to the Ministry of Gender. We as women's organizations are concerned that this limited budget will have a serious and detrimental effect to the advancement of women's rights work in Liberia.

5. Temporary Special Measures

Some measures have been taken to address the capacity gaps between women and men. One of these measures is the empowerment of women through the provision of skills training including literacy and numeracy, Village Saving Loan Schemes (ASLS) and Cash Transfers.

Strategic issue:

- a. When will Government indicate timeline for the implementation of special measures taking into consideration affirmative actions?*
- b. To what extent has the provisions in the policies for people with disabilities been enforced?*

6. Stereotypes and Harmful Practice

The UNDP- UNSCR 1325 impact assessment report documents stereotypes of women as incapable of leadership. A review of the Historical accounts with a view of determining stereotypes and the derivation of socially constructed roles assign to women, continues in present day legendary stories, music and movies as they continue to portray the patriarchy nature of our society. These forms of stereotyping reinforce and further deepen the roots in the harmful and discriminatory practices against women.

Strategic issue:

- a. State party must put in place measure mainly targeting the entertainment industry (i.e. movie, theatre artist), the media, authors of text books, short stories and the general public, to avoid stereotyping women etc.*

7. Issuance of Permits to Practitioners of Female Genital Mutilation

The implementation of legal actions taken against persons violating the Ministry of Internal Affairs' circular No. 12 issued in January 2013 is stalled by the chasm/discrepancy between the civil and customary laws of Liberia. Besides, the enforcement of order on the abolition of groves (i.e. poro and sande societies) have received firm reaction from the Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (also called the National Traditional Council), a backlash has taken place, with political spoilers taken advantage to politicize the Government's efforts to enforce the order. As

result of the reluctance of government, there is increased operation of groves and forceful conscription and other traditional practices still remain prevalent.

Strategic Issues:

- a. *We urge the committee to encourage government to enforce this order (ban on the practice of FGM) by an executive order from the president office.*
- b. *We urge State Party to release its findings on the survey conducted of groves (i.e. poro and sande societies).*
- c. *We urge State Party (National Traditional Council) to uphold the CEDAW Convention in regards to women's dignity.*

8. Violence Against Women

During the last CEDAW review, Sexual and Gender Based violence (SGBV) was identified as a serious issue in Liberiaⁱⁱ. Rape and Domestic violence account for more than 70% of all SGBV reported casesⁱⁱⁱ and there still remain critical impediments. In an attempt to address this problem of SGBV, a draft Domestic Violence Act has been developed. This Act is presently before the National Legislature for passage into law.

Strategic Issue:

- a. *We urge the Committee to recommend that State Party ensure the speedy enactment of the Domestic Violence Act that upholds the standards of the CEDAW Convention.*
- b. *We also urge The Committee to request the measures that will be undertaken by the State so that the socialization process of all laws related to women are given sufficient resources and attention. This includes all necessary training and capacity building of law enforcement officers in the implementation of the Act.*
- c. *What measures have State party put in place to provide access to justice and remedy for female victims of violence such as rape, sexual harassment in schools and work place, harmful traditional practices and introduce special procedures to deal with children as victims and witnesses?*
- d. *We urge the Committee to request of state party the put in place to reprimand people in the justice and security sector that demean and defame victims and witnesses of gender based violence.*

9. Trafficking and Exploitation of Prostitution

All heads of section of the Liberia National Police (LNP) have received basic training relative to approaches in reporting suspected trafficking cases to the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), while LNP staff did not receive specialized training in investigating human trafficking crimes. Notwithstanding, the government has not be able to implement fully its official standard operating procedures for trafficking victim support. As a result of this, it has not convicted any Liberian trafficking offenders under Liberia's anti-trafficking law despite the country's significant internal trafficking problem.

Strategic Issues:

- a. *Trafficking in Person is a huge problem in Liberia. What mechanism has the government put in place to address domestic trafficking and to what extent has the problem been addressed; and*
- b. *What mechanism does the government have in place to collect and by which mean will the statistic be published to the Liberian people.*

10. Participation in Political and Public Life

A draft Act to increase the number of women in political and public life which aimed for 30% quota for women was developed and submitted to the National Legislature in 2009. The act was sent to committee's room for re-wording and has not been passed into law. In September 2015, Women's Organizations again re-submitted a harmonized draft Gender Equity Act to the National Legislature.

Strategic Issues:

- a. *We request the Committee to request from the State Party their plan or timeline for the enactment of this Gender Equity Act and that this Act should also enshrine the CEDAW standards.*
- b. *What efforts has Government made, is making or intent to make to ensuring that the 30% quota for women become a reality; and*
- c. *What specific measures has government taken or intent to take to prepare women politically in terms of capacity development, financial support among many others;*

11. Education

^{iv}Although Liberia has put in place several policies and laws to address the issue of women and girls' education, its implementation still stands as a challenge. To achieve the Universal Primary Education for All (2015) and the Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women goal, laws and policies such as the Education Law of 2001, the National Girls Education Policy (2006) and the Free Compulsory Education Policy (2006/2007) were established. In the CEDAW concluding observations of 2009, several steps were identified towards achieving the educational advancement of women and to address the low level of education of girls and women. One of the steps suggested was to include measures for equal access to all levels of education for women and girls and retention of girls in school.

Strategic Issues:

- a. *We urge the Committee to inquire from Stat Party about the effectiveness of the Education Reform Act in achieving its objectives or goal in regards to increase in the literacy rate among women especially rural women;*
- b. *We urge the Committee to request from State Party the impact of the policy of retaining pregnant girls in schools.*

12. Marriage and Family

In Liberian customary law is still being practiced, whereby a girl child age 16 can be wedded. Besides, the harmonization of the Customary Law with that of the Children's Law has not been effected. In practice, the civil court has no jurisdiction (i.e. redress of grievance) on a marriage carried out under the customary system of marriage. More consequential, polygamous marriage is legal under the Customary Law, putting women at disadvantage especially in case of joint ownership of multiple wives under the customary regime.

Strategic Issue:

- a. *What are the progress made to date on the harmonization of both the Customary and Children's Law; and*
- b. *What measures has government taken to create awareness on the provisions of the Customary Law?*

13. Rural Women

In order to ensure proper management policies have been put in place to develop and implemented the programs of the rural women structure. The Policy seeks to build skills, create access to market, finance and advocate legal and regulatory reforms in order to protect women entrepreneurs. Even though the Rural Women Structure has some level of support from the government (Gender Ministry) there is a huge need for capacity development, proper coordination, conflict resolution skills and resources to sustain such structure in the absence of donor funding. There is limited cordiality between the structure and other women's organizations.

In order to ensure proper management of the Rural Women Structure, government policies have been put in place to develop and implement programs that seeks to build skills, create access to market, finance and advocate legal and regulatory reforms in order to protect women entrepreneur and even though the Rural Women Structure has some level of support from the women machinery there is limited cordiality between the structure and other women organization.

Strategic issue:

- a. *What kind support (financial, technical, etc.) is government providing to the national rural women structure in order for them to become empower and sustainable after donor funding.*
- b. *What efforts have government made to reconcile all rural women structures in Liberia?*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

WONGOSOL on behalf of Women Civil Society Organizations of Liberia recommend to CEDAW the following; that:

- Re-enforcement mechanism be developed on policies to which the government is signatory to in order to effect the girl child educational outreach (Compulsory Free Primary education for girls) and the implementation of other legal and programmatic structures;
- All women and girls who are forcibly recruited into the Sande Society be accorded justice and protection;
- Provisions be included in the new Constitution to grant equal rights to women to transfer their nationality to their children given birth to outside the country and to Aliens;
- Government develop and be committed to implementing complementary mechanisms that will support consistent implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda;
- The Government accelerate the implementation of the Law reform process, mainly involving the harmonization of the Customary and Statutory laws;
- Ensure proper coordination and reconciliation amongst the Rural Women Structures on one hand and between existing women organizations in the counties; and
- Increase support not only to the rural women structure but to other existing women organization in the counties.

DETAILED REPORT

1. Impact of the Ebola virus disease on women

The Ebola epidemic that plagued Liberia in 2014 affected women severely due to the essential role they play as caretakers, health personnel, farmers and small traders. This situation was made worse by the weak health system. The epidemic took huge toll on women's economic gains, education and livelihood. Currently, there is no comprehensive gender impact assessment or statistical data on the impact of the EVD on the lives and livelihoods of women. However, a number of research/studies are being carried out by Local and International NGOs with a view of determining the overall impact of the virus on women. For example, PREVAIL, an American-Liberian NGO, Touching People In Need of Kindness (THINK), and National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE) are currently mapping out the socio-economic impact of the EVD on women.

Meanwhile, to mitigate the impact of the EVD crisis on women, the Government of Liberia has developed and delivered quick impact service-based interventions including the provision of cash transfers to support the households most affected by EVD epidemic aimed at strengthening social safety nets while building a social protection system to address risks and shocks inclusive of female headed households and women community networks. In this respect, more than 2,000 EVD affected households identified to have been living in extreme poverty as a result of the EVD crisis have benefited from the cash transfer program. The cash transfer program was a part of the Liberia Economic Stabilization and Recovery Plan. Regrettably, the participation of Women-Based Organizations in the development of this plan as well as their representation on emergency response and recovery efforts was and remains to be decimally low.

2. Constitutional and Institutional Framework and Access to Justice

A national Constitution Review Process currently ongoing derived 25 Recurring Views forwarded to the National Legislature to be debated. The Constitution Review Committee was established in 2012 to, among other things: arrange public discourses and debates on the constitution with a view to ensuring the constitution is in conformity with Liberia's post conflict democratic realities and aspirations and craft proposals for amending the constitution. In the consultation process a national women's conference to identify key women issues for inclusion. Particular recommendation was made to mainstream gender in the articles of the Constitution by providing for the domestication of the CEDAW Convention. Of the 25 Recurring Views derived, only six or 25 percent are gender-specific. These include the following:

- View # 18: The constitution should ensure women's participation in governance and national affairs. Article 11 & 50;
- View # 19: The constitution and all legal documents should carry the pronouns he/she;

- View # 20: Age of marriage for girls should be at least 18 years. Article 23b;
- View # 21: Women should have access to equal economic and social opportunities. (employment and education) Article 7;
- View # 22: The constitution should inheritance right for traditional women. Article 23b; and
- View # 25: Customary laws should be made constitutional. Article 5b.^v

Final decision on the acceptance for adoption in The earlier mentioned 25 Recurring Views including the above mentioned six gender-sensitive ones would be voted

3. Women and Peace Security

Liberia became the first country in Africa to adopt a National Action Plan in 2009, consistent with implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This Plan, in conjunction with key gender-related policies including the Gender-Based Violence National Action Plan, and the National Gender Policy, provides guidelines for work around gender equality.² An assessment of the impact of resolution 1325 on women and girls was conducted 2014 in Liberia. Results from the exercise disclosed that “a number of significant legal and administrative policies have been developed to address issues of women peace and security. There were more awareness and public education on violence against women and women are becoming more vocal in asserting their rights. This result seemingly reflect the “Most Significant Change(MSC)” relative to women peace and security considering the fact that traditional practices sanctioned a culture of silence where women suffered quietly and prevented women from speaking out 10 years ago. Besides the above mentioned assessment, the government through the Gender Ministry commissioned an evaluation of the Action Plan but the findings has not been released as the ministry is still reviewing the findings; as such no fix date has been provided for the adoption.

In spite of this marked improvement made, there are still challenges which emphasize the urgency to scale up interventions. Moreover, with support from UN Agencies, Liberia implemented four joint programmes (UNJP), including UNJP to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, UNJP on Food Security and Nutrition, the UNJP on Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment, and UNJP for Employment and Empowerment of Young Women.

4. National Machinery for the Advancement of Women

In a 2014 UNDP assessment of the impact of resolution 1325 on women and girls in Liberia, it was observed that “a number of significant legal and administrative policies have been developed to address issues of women peace and security since the launched of the Liberia national plan in 2009. There is more awareness and public education on violence against women and women are more vocal in asserting their rights.

² Women Count - Security Council Resolution 1325: Civil Society Monitoring Report 2011, p. 107

5. Temporary Special Measures

Some measures have been taken to address the capacity gaps between women and men. One of these measures is the empowerment of women through the provision of skills and literacy training. The Liberia Adult Literacy Program which mainly targets rural illiterate women provides basic literacy to enhance women's confidence in their abilities. The United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) is currently negotiating with the Board of midwifery to improve the career path for midwifery by upgrading it from a certificate to a degree-level program, make the program tuition-free for students, and encourage more women to attend by.

6. Stereotypes and Harmful Practice

The UNDP UNSCR 1325 impact assessment report documents stereotypes of women as incapable of leadership. Additionally, review of folklores including legendary stories of Liberia and historical accounts with a view of determining stereotypes and the derivation of socially constructed roles assigned to women disclosed that:

- In Liberian folk literature, the major characters or protagonists of folklores were always men except in cases where the said character played the role of queen. Folk tales in which a queen and king are major characters, the king is often the played the lead/superior role; and
- Throughout the history of Liberia, the role of women had mostly been associated with industrial, hospitality, organization, management of resources, planning and or similar functions that reflect capabilities they are perceived. For example, the role of women in the History of Liberia is mainly marked by the design/development of the flag of Liberia. Presumably, based on gender analysis, this task was given to women as a result of the perception that the profession of women was mostly interior design, tailoring, etc. Other professional roles assigned by society to women were the role of caregiving. In post-conflict Liberia, the mass increase of women in the fields of nursing, pre-primary teaching, etc. is a reflection of the fact that the domesticated position of women as house wives has been extended in the professional setting thus strengthening societal designations of them as care givers and adages to men.
- The most common gender identity and ideology ascribed to women in public spaces were seemingly that they are good “help mates.” This designation of women as adages seemingly has unweaving religious grounding. For example, as proclaimed by many pastors, the Pauline texts relative to the roles of women urged them to be “submissive to husbands (I Peter 3: 1);” “keep silent (I Timothy 2:11);” “submit to men as lord (Ephesians 5:22),” etc. The Muslim and other religions, including the traditional/customary regimes of Liberia also affirm this position.

These forms of stereotyping reinforce and further root deeper in the harmful and discriminatory practices against women.

However the above, some notable women who have excel to prominence and top-nontch leadership positions have proven this notion wrong. Some of these women include President Ellen Johnson Saileaf, Senator Jewel Haward Tayloy, Hon. Muna Pelham Youngblood, among others. This achievement reflects the success of ongoing awareness activities being carried out in schools, churches, communities, etc.

7. Issuance of Permits to Practitioners of Female Genital Mutilation

In regards to the ban on female genital mutilation, President Sirleaf publicly announced her commitment in ensuring the complete adherence to the enforcement of said ban. The president's action was in support of the 2011 Law on Children which offers protection against all forms of violence including FGM.

Relative to implementation and legal actions taken against persons violating the Ministry of Internal Affairs' circular No. 12 issued in January 2013, the actualization of this order is stalled by the chasm/discrepancy between the civil and customary laws of Liberia. Besides, enforcement of order on the abolition of grooves (i.e. poro and sande societies) have received firm reaction from the Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (also called the National Traditional Council), a backlash which political spoilers had taken advantage of to politicize the Government's efforts making GoL reluctant to persist. Consequently, operation of groves in Liberia and forceful conscription, among other traditional practices still remain prevalent.

8. Violence Against Women

A timeframe for the Domestic Violence Bill in Liberia depends on the President's political will. The President promised to collaborate with the National Legislature to pass into law the proposed Domestic Violence Act endorsed by the Liberian Cabinet on June 15, 2015 and is currently before the lawmakers for enactment. The draft Bill defines Domestic Violence pursuant to Article 2 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Violence against women and girls remains a big concern for Liberia women and is often perceived as an individual problem and as isolated incidents. However, a glance at empirical evidence presents an alarming picture. For example, UNMIL consolidated data from Circuit Courts show that Montserrado County accounts for 61% of all reported cases, 88% of survivors/victims being below 18 and 13% younger than 10. Cases of GBV recorded by MoGCSP in 2014 include 682 rape cases (49%); 407 physical assaults and domestic violence (29%) and 40 persistent non-support (2, 9%). Additionally, 110 cases were received by the Sex Crimes Unit in 2014. In 2015, up to August, 51 cases were received. According to the Crimes Unit, four convictions were reached in 2014 and eight up to August in 2015. A total of 254 cases are pending. See some secondary data collected from other sources below.

Table 1: Liberian National Police Cases - 2012 - 2015³ in Grand Gedeh County

Case	2012				2013				2014				2015			
	Reported	Court	Resolved	Pending	Reported	Court	Resolved	Pending	Reported	Court	Resolved	Pending	Reported	Court	Resolved	Pending
Sexual Gender Based Violence																
Rape	21	13	0	8	17	10	0	7	13	4	0	9	14	8	0	6
Corruption of Minors	3	3	0	0	2	0	0	2	3	2	0	1	2	0	0	2
Gang Rape	2	1	1	0	- ⁴	-	-	-	1	0	0	1	-	-	-	-
Sexual Assault	5	2	0	3	2	1	0	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Criminal attempt to commit rape	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0	0	1	-	-	-	-
Incest/Rape	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0	0
Domestic Violence																
Aggravated Assault	14	10	1	3	12	8	0	4	38	8	25	5	3	3	2	1
Simple Assault	40	11	24	5	8	6	2	0	12	8	2	2	5	5	6	1

³ Cases reported in 2015 are from January to May

⁴ Hyphens in the table indicate that the information is not available

Table 2: Trends in the reporting and resolution of GBV cases reported to Liberian National Police between 2012 and 2015³⁸ for Grand Gedeh County

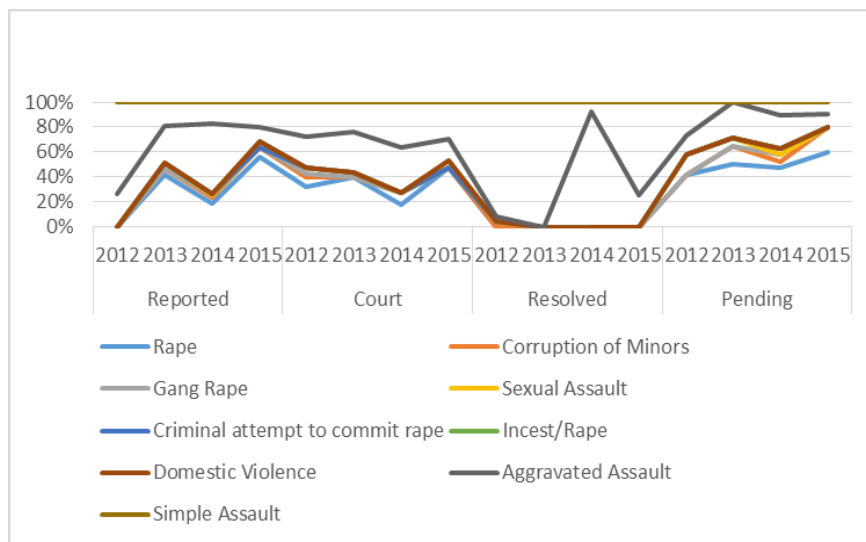


Table 3: Report of GBV cases handled by one CSO showing trends over 3 years for Grand Gedeh County

Incident Type	2013	2014	2015	2013-2015
Rape	11	19	7	37
Sexual Assault	8	15	0	23
Physical Assault	117	57	33	207
Forced Marriage	0	0	2	2
Denial of Resources (Economic violence)	36	23	10	69
Psychological/Emotional Abuse	14	26	11	51
Non GBV	62	32	11	105
Total	248	172	74	494

Meanwhile, apart from sexual violence, VAW include domestic violence, which is suspected to be grossly underreported; FGM/C and other traditional practices, like early marriages. The 2013 Health and Demographic Survey indicates that about 38% of women aged 20-24 are married in union before age 18 and that adolescent pregnancy accounts for a total 0.14% of Liberia's fertility rate. Teenage pregnancy stands at 31% and FGM/C is widely accepted and practiced in 10 out of 15 counties⁵. Twenty per cent of girls experience sex before age 15, one in seven against their will. This issue has sparked serious debate within different circles.

Another major factor contributing to VAW in Liberia is poverty. The Liberia Food and Nutrition Survey⁶ give a comprehensive assessment of food security, with more than 84% of the population living below the poverty line of 1.25 USD a day (UNDP 2013). The majority of the population simply cannot afford to buy sufficient or varied food leading to exposure to different forms of violence. Overall, 15% of urban households are considered very poor compared with 74% in rural areas. Furthermore, an understanding of what constitutes VAW is low, and the culture of silence among women and girls affected by violence persists and cultural attitude towards the problem is acceptable.

Violence against Women (VAW), including rape, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, and forced and early marriage, is widespread and is allowed to occur with impunity in Liberia. In spite the fact that inheritance and rape laws were respectively passed in 2003 and 2005, culturally entrenched patriarchal power structures and traditional laws prevent women from accessing formal justice, see evidence from number of cases pending trial as presented in Table 1. Similar to other VAW cases such as early marriage, the civil law states the legal age for marriage at 18 years for women however, cultural and traditional practices do not respect this provision. Oftentimes, data on VAW is not systematically collected and existing data does not reflect the reality of VAW, making it difficult for women NGOs to argue about the prevalence rate of VAW.

9. Trafficking and Exploitation of Prostitution

The government provides legal alternatives to removal to countries in which victims would face retribution or hardship, such as temporary residency, on a case-by-case basis. All section heads of the Liberia National Police (LNP) received basic training on how to report suspected trafficking cases to the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), while LNP staff did not receive specialized training in investigating human trafficking crimes. However, the WACPS continued to provide a mandatory three-week anti-trafficking training for all of its new officers. The anti-trafficking taskforce conducted several training for 160 law enforcement and community leaders focused on the identification of victims and their traffickers; these workshops were jointly funded by the government and an international organization. The government sustained modest efforts to prevent trafficking in persons. The government's anti-trafficking taskforce held monthly meetings and began implementation of the country's national action plan. The Ministry of Labor continued to support anti-trafficking awareness campaigns through radio public service messages and billboards. The government allocated the equivalent of

⁵ Draft GoL/UN joint programming Initiative to prevent and Respond to SGBV and Harmful Traditional Practices in Liberia

⁶GoL, 2013. Liberia Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS).

approximately \$15,000 toward victim protection and assistance in 2014 and additional funds in 2015 to rescue and rehabilitate victims from Lebanon.

In the face of the above mentioned efforts, there remained no government-run shelters or safe homes specifically for trafficking victims in Liberia, and the government continued to rely heavily on NGOs and civil society groups to provide basic assistance and financial support to victims. Notwithstanding, the government has not been able to implement fully its official standard operating procedures for trafficking victim support. Consequently, it has not convicted any Liberian trafficking offenders under Liberia's anti-trafficking law despite the country's significant internal and external trafficking challenges. Meanwhile, a case involving 12 Liberian girls who were allegedly trafficked to Lebanon was being trialed.

10. Participation in Political and Public Life

The election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as Africa's first female president has opened the corridor for women participation at all levels in Liberia. In the Executive Cabinet, women constitute 14% of appointed positions. In the Judiciary, two out of five Supreme Court justices are women with five out of 16 in subordinate courts. In the Legislature, the number of women in elected positions dropped from 14% in 2005 to 9% in 2015.

Statistical impression of data on women participation in the EC reflects the effects of patriarchal and systematic traditional governance system in which women mainly play various supportive roles to administration, mainly as adages to men often in feminized position such as secretary and receptionists. This is evidenced by results from the ministries studied during the conduct of a Gender Audit Study. For example, 15 or 60 percent of the total number of 25 administration support staff including special assistants (13: seven women and six men), secretaries (eight persons: six women and two men), chief-of-office staff (three persons: 2 women and a sole male), and technical assistant (a sole male) were women. This limited excel of women in senior leadership positions can be attributed to the fact the: a) gender equality has seemingly not yet been incorporated in the tenets of governance and democratization in Liberia though there is in theory a huge commitment of the Government of Liberia (GoL) to ensure the implementation of legal, policy, and programmatic structures aimed at advancing women in leadership positions; b) there is seemingly limited political will in support of promoting a mass emergence of women in senior leadership positions. For example, only at the ministerial level has Liberia achieve 30 percent participation of women in public leadership position; and c) women serving in various administration staff positions were seemingly being provided opportunities to pursue higher education to enable them excel up the leadership ladder.

Meanwhile, a bill to provide for a 30 percent quota for women continues to linger in the Legislature since 2009, despite three revisions. However, the revised elections law passed in 2014 allows for 30 percent representation of women in the leadership of political party structures and on their candidate listings. In spite of this measure, women participation in the leadership of political parties is marginally low at 8.6 percent of the total of 23 chairpersons of political parties.^{vi} Additionally, from data reviewed, no political party had a women secretary general or a vice-chairperson. Meanwhile, the fact that three or 13.0 percent of the standard bearers of

political parties in Liberia were women did not translate in to an increase in participation of women in those women-headed political parties.

Training on leadership and negotiation skills and financial support to female aspirants have been identified as crucial success factors to ensuring the mass emergence of women in political and public life. Prior to and during the conduct of the 2011 elections, several international and Liberian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) partnered with government and international donors to provide support to aspiring female candidates. For example, the National Elections Commission, UNDP and International Alert jointly trained female aspirants in fundraising skills, logistical knowledge and political campaign strategy. Over 400 women participated in the trainings, which were held in five counties. These interventions to political parties' frameworks that prioritized participation of women saw 49% women registration and participation in the 2011 elections process among 1.9 million eligible voters.⁷

Currently, there is no ongoing government-led training and or financial support intervention benefiting women in politics. However, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection in collaboration with partners including the National Elections Commission, and International Fellowship on Election Systems carried out said activities during past elections. Meanwhile, the Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia is currently delivering training targeting ----- women aspirants including those in public life.

The Upper and Lower House of the National Legislature of Liberia have concurred on and forwarded to the president of Liberia a bill to provide financial incentives for political parties to nominate equal numbers of women and men as candidates. The president has neither signed nor expressed public opinion on this bill, which means, according to the laws of Liberia, it is presuming passed into law but has not be implemented.

11. Education

In the 2013 LDHS, women and men in urban areas have much higher literacy rates (62 percent and 81 percent, respectively) than their rural counterparts (26 percent and 58 percent, respectively). For women, Montserrado and Maryland have the highest literacy rates (71 percent and 47 percent). For men, Montserrado and Grand Kru have the highest literacy rates (84 percent and 77 percent, respectively). Bong has the lowest literacy rate for both women and men (20 percent and 53 percent). Literacy closely correlates with increasing wealth quintile for both women and men. Relative to efforts made to remove stereotype from textbooks and teaching materials,

Since the adoption of the education reform act, there have not been the implementation of measures to encourage girls to consider non-traditional fields of study and occupations. If the Liberian Government does not ensure that there is a mass emergence of girls in non-traditional fields of study, they would be even more largely clustered in the informal sectors as women today are.

⁷<http://www.lr.undp.org/>

12. Marriage and Family

In the customary regime, the boy child is prioritized over the girl while women are considered as property to men. A girl child is seemingly not seen as an integral part of a family, but rather as a person who will soon disengage or be separated from the family in a marriage to a man thus losing the name and identity of her family of birth. As a result of this, in most part of Liberia, women do not have joint ownership to land with male heirs. There is no established law that treats boys and girls equally in Liberia.

The customary law is still being practiced, whereby a girl child age 16 can be weeded. Besides, the harmonization of the Customary Law with that of the Children's Law has not been effected. In practice, the civil court has no jurisdiction (i.e. redress of grievance) on a marriage carried out under the customary system of marriage. More consequential, polygamous marriage is legal under the Customary Law, putting women at disadvantage especially in case of joint ownership of multiple wives under the customary regime. Additionally, it is not certain that there is a legal prohibition of sanction imposed on early and forced marriage in rural areas. However, some gains to reverse this trend. For instance, the establishment of the Law Reform Commission was implemented and is currently reviewing both laws for harmonization. Legislators are also being trained on approaches in review and harmonizing the laws.

13. Rural Women

The Rural Women Structure was created as a platform for rural women to express their concerns, evaluate their accomplishments and advance strategies to tackle challenges and one of the major concerns was the need for support to rural women farmers to improve their livelihoods and secure increased in food security. In order to ensure proper management policies have been put in place to develop and implemented the programs of the rural women structure. The Policy seeks to build skills, create access to market, finance and advocate legal and regulatory reforms in order to protect women entrepreneurs. Even though the Rural Women Structure has some level of support from the government (Gender Ministry) there is a huge need for capacity development, proper coordination, conflict resolution skills and resources to sustain such structure in the absence of donor funding. There is limited cordiality between the structure and other women's organizations.

CONCLUSION

As Liberia submits her seventh and eight reports to the CEDAW Committee, it is worth noting that advances have been made by government in addressing the plight of women. However there still exist many challenges to guarantee the improvement of the rights of Liberian Women. This Shadow Report emphasized that though government has taken steps thus far by enacting laws, developing policies, initiating programmes, among many others, existing challenges outweigh mitigating measures. This means interventions must be scaled-up to achieve multiplier results to adequately address the protection of women's right.

This report further recognizes several causes such as the reluctance of government to adequately address and implement its obligations, initiatives to support more women actors in raising their voices on issues such as FGM, VAW empowerment, education amongst many others.

Against this backdrop, state party needs to be more robust in the pragmatic implementation of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination of Against Women.

ⁱ GNWP Liberia 2011 Report

ⁱⁱ See CEDAW/C/LBR/CO/6. Liberia has accepted 36 recommendations on the subject in its most recent UPR.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Gender and Development Annual Report, 2012

^{iv} (2012- CEDAW ALTERNATIVE [1] OBY-ADESWAH-CONSULTANTS)

^v National Constitution Conference (NCC) Report; p. 27

^{vi} Gender Audit Study, Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), 2015

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^{vi} Draft GoL/UN joint programming Initiative to prevent and Respond to SGBV and Harmful Traditional Practices in Liberia

^{vi} GoL, 2013. Liberia Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS).

^{vi} Women Count - Security Council Resolution 1325: Civil Society Monitoring Report 2011, p. 107

^{vi} Cases reported in 2015 are from January to May

^{vi} Hyphens in the table indicate that the information is not available

^{vi} Draft GoL/UN joint programming Initiative to prevent and Respond to SGBV and Harmful Traditional Practices in Liberia

^{vi} GoL, 2013. Liberia Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS)

^{vi} <http://www.lr.undp.org/>

^{vi} National Constitution Conference (NCC) Report; p. 27

^{vi} Gender Audit Study, Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), 2015

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