

# EMPOWERING WOMEN IN LIBERIA

JOINT PROGRAMME ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

## CONTEXT

Women have played a major role throughout the history of Liberia. They comprise 54 percent of the labour force in both the formal and informal sectors. In agriculture they constitute the majority of smallholder producers and it is estimated that they produce approximately 60 percent of agricultural products, carry out more than 80 percent of trading activities in the rural areas and are heavily engaged in the artisanal fishing industry, in addition to fulfilling daily household chores.

Yet women remain among the most disadvantaged. They are disproportionately clustered in the least productive sectors, with 90 percent employed in the informal sector or agriculture. Their predominance in the informal economy translates into low productivity, meagre earnings and exposure to exploitation.

Illiteracy rates among women aged 15-49 are particularly high (60 percent) compared to men (30 percent). 42 percent of Liberian women and 18 percent of men have never attended school.

In rural areas, literacy rates are staggeringly low at 26 percent, while the gender gap in secondary school attendance is very high, with a net attendance ratio of 6 percent for females. While 19 percent of men have completed secondary school or higher, only 8 percent of women have accomplished the same.

Maternal mortality is one of the highest in the world, and is estimated at 994/100,000 births (DHS 2007). According to the 2007 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey, 48 percent of Liberian women become pregnant by the age of 18, and the unmet need for family planning is over 60 percent. The health needs in Liberia are significant with limited access to health care facilities. In Liberia, 40 percent of the population is highly vulnerable to food insecurity, and women, who lack means of sustainable livelihoods, employment skills and suffer from higher rates of malnutrition, are particularly susceptible.

In addition to food insecurity, women are also exposed to gender based violence, sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDS, especially among young girls. Vicious and systematic acts of sexual violence were perpetrated against a significant number of Liberian women throughout the years of conflict. Following the end of the conflict, rape and sexual violence remain an ongoing problem.

## KEY FACTS

Duration:	36 months (January 2009 – December 2011)
Total budget:	US\$ 15, 914,000
Funding available:	US\$ 6,890,000
Funding required:	US\$ 9,024,000
Lead Ministry:	Ministry of Gender and Development
Other Ministries:	Ministries of Commerce and Education
UN Agencies:	UNDP, UNESCO, UNIFEM, OHCHR, ILO, UNOPS, UNMIL and the World Bank

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Strengthening coordination and accountability mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment
- Capacity building for relevant government agencies and civil society, at various levels, to foster effective engagement and accountability in implementation of gender sensitive policies and programmes
- Increasing women's empowerment through enhancing earning potential, increasing employment opportunities and improving educational achievement



A Joint Programme of the Government of Liberia and the United Nations



**JOINT PROGRAMME**

The Government of Liberia has expressed its commitment to achieving gender equality and women's rights as a means to maintaining peace, reducing poverty, enhancing justice and promoting sustainable development. The country has achieved some noticeable progress towards gender equality. Two key policy documents that will significantly transform the landscape of gender imbalance and enhance women's position in the development of Liberia are currently being finalised: the National Gender Policy and the National Action Plan on Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The most significant achievement for Liberia has been the election of its present President, the first female Head of State in Africa.

The Government of Liberia and the United Nations have agreed to advance the effort to promote gender equality with the framework of a Joint Programme. The Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, signed in February 2009, represents a coherent and effective response by the UN family in Liberia to the alarming need for improved gender equality in Liberia. The Joint Programme was designed to directly support the Government's efforts to address this issue. The Joint Programme outlines interventions aligned with the Government priorities stated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the strategic needs of women. In addition, the Joint Programme takes account of and is in accord with the priorities identified by Liberian women at the National Women's Conference in Monrovia in May 2008.

The Joint Programme has three main components. (see box) Timely implementation of the Joint Programme will significantly contribute to altering the gender equality picture in Liberia.

Activities under the first two components are mutually re-enforcing. The first targets: strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Gender and Development to deliver on its mandate of coordination and mainstreaming gender into all national development processes. Efforts will be made to establish mechanisms to support the accountability of stakeholders on gender commitments. The second component promotes and strategically supports opportunities and capacities for a more robust interaction among civil society, legislators and policy makers. This will foster national discourse and consensus on important gender policies.

The third component aims to address the gender imbalance in economic power through targeted investments addressing existing structural barriers to women's economic empowerment in order to unleash women's potential for wealth and employment creation.

On the Government side, parties to the Joint Programme include the Ministries of Gender and Development, Labour, Commerce and Education. The United Nations participation includes the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Fund (UNESCO), United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the World Bank.

The Ministry of Gender and Development coordinates the Joint Programme, with support from the United Nations. The UN Resident Coordinator provides general guidance; UNIFEM is the Lead Coordinating Agency and UNDP is the Administrative Agent.



**THE FOUR OUTCOME AREAS**

- Strengthened coordination and accountability mechanisms for gender equality and women empowerment.
- Capacity developed for effective engagement and accountability in the implementation of gender sensitive policies and programmes.
- Women's empowerment through increasing women's earning potential, educational achievement, employment opportunities and organisational capacities.
- The latter objective of women empowerment is an affirmative intervention aimed directly at reducing gender inequalities while the two former objectives aim to ensure gender mainstreaming across Government's policies and programmes.

The Joint Programme is set to run from January 2009 – December 2011.

**IMPLEMENTING MODALITIES**

The Ministry of Gender and Development has the overarching mandate to coordinate government action to promote gender equality and women rights. The Ministry will collaborate with other relevant Government Ministries to secure their involvement and ensure effective implementation of the Joint Programme. The Ministry of Labour is envisaged to play a similar role for the joint UNIFEM/ILO project that is being included in this Joint Programme and will be an important actor in the management of this programme.

The Joint Programme also allows for a fast funding mechanism, under which external funding can flow directly to the programme, via a 'pass-through' mechanism, administered by UNDP. This provides flexibility for outputs and activities to be adapted locally and re-shaped as needs emerge, with unallocated funds being directed accordingly, while keeping objectives and strategy unchanged. The advantage for donors is that funding can be allocated quickly, and efficiently, with overhead costs kept as low as possible and no or minimal duplication of efforts from agencies, and one streamlined reporting mechanism.

**FUNDING REQUIREMENTS**

Funding for this Joint Programme will enable the empowerment of women, based on priorities identified by Liberian women and will greatly assist in the economic and social empowerment of women. The total estimated costs for the entire Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is US\$ 15.9 million.





## CASE STUDY

### Cassava farmers reap dividends

A project for farmers is bringing basic technology and skills to several villages in Nimba, the second most populous county in Liberia. It is also helping hundreds of women reap rich dividends from adopting slight changes to how they grow, and sell, the biggest cash crop in the region. Five hundred and twenty five female and twenty six male farmers, members of the Ganta Concern Women Group (GCWG) are benefitting from this project in 11 villages and communities in Ganta region of Nimba County.

The Ministries of Gender and Development, Agriculture and Internal Affairs, UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), World Bank, International Centre for Women Research (ICRW), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UN Education and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are working together with the GCWG to help transform small scale cassava production into a sustainable agro-business enterprise. It is part of the wider results based initiatives funded by the World Bank in five other countries and contributes to the national strategic objective of reducing poverty and increasing women's economic empowerment.

Under the project, cassava is grown in communal plots that have been dedicated for exclusive use of the GCWG members

by the community. Previously, farmers grew cassava in individual plots and sold the tuber in raw form as soon as it was harvested, with marginal profits. This particular project involves the farmer organization in the adoption of improved methods of planting and harvesting of Cassava, processing the tuber prior to sale, and training in basic literacy. The project aims to also assist farmer organizations identify markets for their produce.

UNIFEM, is implementing the project with the local non-governmental organization, Agriculture Relief Services (ARS). FAO provides the cassava cuttings, trains members of the organization in agro-processing and micro-enterprise development and management, as well as provides the farming tools and a cassava processing machine.

UNESCO, together with the Ministry of Education's Adult Literacy Division is training women on keeping accounts of profits and expenses, the first and only form of education some have had. UNIFEM has constructed a processing plant and has provided a cassava processing machine that processes raw cassava into a flour-like food staple called Farina or Gari.

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