



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women**

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under  
article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms  
of Discrimination against Women**

**Combined initial, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth periodic  
reports of States parties**

**Liberia\***

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\* The present report is being issued without formal editing.







**Government of Liberia**  
**September 2008**

*State Party Report*

*on the*

*Convention to Eliminate All Forms of  
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

It is with appreciation and profound gratitude that I acknowledge the tireless efforts of the various agencies of Government and our partners, whose contributions made this report possible. The Government of Liberia is also grateful to the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations and the experts on the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women for their patience, guidance and support.

This report was written with the assistance of eight working groups, which comprised of various Government Ministries, Agencies, Civil Society Organizations, International Organizations and the UN. These groups were responsible for collecting data and relevant information on each of the Conventions Articles.

Two national validation exercises were held with participants from sector Ministries and Agencies, the UN System, Community/Traditional leaders, Civil Society Organizations, Women and Youth Groups, the Association of the Disabled, and faith based organizations.

With the submission of this report, we stress the Government of Liberia's commitment to women's empowerment. This commitment must be translated into action and through widespread multi-sectoral action and capacity strengthening in gender analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation at all levels.

Certainly, the preparation of the report was challenging, particularly for a country and people who have just come out of war. Most all data used in this report has only become available in the past year. We recognize that valid data often makes it easier to tell a story as it is, and therefore, disallows subjectivity and distortion of the facts. With that in mind, this report was prepared based on the best available data. It is, therefore, our hope that subsequent reports would be greatly improved.

Again, we extend our profound gratitude to the UN System and our colleagues, whose contributions made this report possible.

Kind regards.

Vabah K. Gayflor  
**Minister of Gender & Development**

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION

AAG	-	Action Awareness Group
AIDS	-	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ALP	-	Accelerated Learning Program
ANC	-	Antenatal Care
BPHS	-	Basic Package of Health Services
CAAS-Lib	-	Comprehensive Assessment of Agriculture Survey in Liberia
CDA	-	Cooperative Development Agency
CEDAW	-	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CFSN	-	Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey
CHWS	-	Communities Health Survey
CM	-	Certified Midwifery
FAWE	-	Forum for African Women Educationist
FGM	-	Female Genital Mutilation
FPAL	-	Family Planning Association of Liberia
GED	-	General Education Diploma
GBV	-	Gender Based Violence
HIV	-	Human Immune Virus
IEC	-	Information, Education, Communication
IFM	-	Informal Financial Market
INGOS-	-	International Non-Governmental Organizations
IPRS	-	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy
ITNS	-	Insecticide Treated Nets
JFKMC	-	John F. Kennedy Medical Center
LET	-	Liberia Education Trust Fund
LDHS	-	Liberia Demography & Health Survey
LISGIS	-	Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LURD	-	Liberian United For Reconciliation Democracy in Liberia
MCC	-	Monrovia City Corporation
MOH&SW	-	Ministry of Health & Social Welfare

NASSCORP		National Social Security & Welfare Corporation
NDS	-	National Drugs Service
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organization
NHA	-	National Housing Authority
NATPAH		National Association on Traditional Practices Affecting Health
RH	-	Reproductive Health
SEA	-	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SGBB	-	Sexual Gender Based Violence
STI	-	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TOT	-	Trainer of Trainers
VCT	-	Voluntary Counseling and Testing
WHO	-	World Health Organization

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## **I. PREFACE**

Liberia has just emerged from 14 years of civil crisis, devastating its infrastructure, the economy, and the corresponding political institutions. The virtual collapse of the economy, and what amounts to the near withering away of the state, seemed to initially make reconstruction impossible. Successive transitional governments which tried to re-establish the rule of law, and by extension, the promotion and protection of human rights were either too weak, perhaps not totally committed, or seemingly lacked the capacity to carry through.

However, under the current administration, efforts are not only being taken to get the necessary reforms and policies right, as well as the initiation of physical reconstruction of basic and productive infrastructure, but also the restoration of the rule of law, and particularly the protection of, the inalienable rights of all citizens.

Government has, therefore, taken on a more intense and analytical look at the population for the purpose of identifying the most deprived of the citizens, and has come to the conclusion that women as an aggregate are the most discriminated against and deprived people in the Liberian society.

To this end, Government has instituted several policies for the purpose of building the capacity of women through the acquisition of skills and appropriate education including the provision of equal opportunities for employment. Today about 14% of the cabinet are women while women constitute about 5.3% of the legislature and occupy 0.8% of the judiciary. In the Judiciary Branch of Government, for instance, two of the five (40%) Associate Justices of the Supreme Court are women and even in the military and paramilitary such as the police, women have made desirable progress.

In addition to these opportunities the Government continues to support scholarship programs; one of which is exclusively targeted at girls. These are just few examples of the areas the Government has succeeded in achieving. It must not, however, be construed to mean that the evil of discriminating against women has gone away and that they have gained parity with men. This report, therefore, represents the situation of women in Liberia, and the initiative being taken by the Government in collaboration with its partners and other stakeholders. As was stated earlier, it is acknowledged that discriminatory practices still exist as well as the corresponding gaps between women and men. As a consequence, this imposes upon the Government an obligation and duty to hasten the removal of the remaining social and economic hurdles that impede the progress of women.

The preparation of this document is an opportunity to pursue those areas not yet touched and consummate those that have been initiated. To this end, the Government recognizes the technical support provided by the United Nations, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Experts on the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women who facilitated and supported the preparation of this report.



## **II. GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

### **GEOGRAPHIC SITUATION**

Liberia is a country in transition from a war-induced complex emergency situation to recovery and development. The general condition is that of a lack of basic life-sustaining necessities, including physical infrastructure and professional personnel (brain drain), resulting in a prolonged period of returning to pre-war levels and movement towards development.

Liberia is located on the bulge of the West Coast of Africa, a Sub-Region laden with several socio-economic and political difficulties that present a formidable challenge to national development. Nevertheless, the Sub Region also presents an opportunity for the fostering of national and international goodwill toward rebuilding the country, to assume its primary role of protecting human rights, particularly those of children and women.

The total area of Liberia is 111,370 kilometers situated north of the equator. Liberia is bounded on the north by Guinea, the south by the Atlantic Ocean, to the east by Cote d'Ivoire and on the west by Sierra Leone. Liberia has a coastline of 579 kilometers. The Liberian border with Guinea is 515 kilometers, with Cote d'Ivoire, 615 kilometers, and with Sierra Leone, 254 kilometers.

The country generally has tropical rainforest vegetation, characterized by a predominance of leguminous trees and small volume of timber trees. These natural resources, together with the tropical rainforest, not only provide the major export-earning base for the Liberian economy, but also ensure the livelihood of the majority of the rural population, especially the women, who make up about 75-80% of farm labor and are the chief source of food security and the nutritional needs of children.

There are two climatic seasons in Liberia, the dry and the rainy seasons, with each covering about six months. The former runs from November to April, while the latter spans from May to October.

The peak agricultural or farming season is from November to April. This however varies slightly from one Region to the other. This is the high period for farming activities that requires all human resources of the family, including the children, who are trained to perform various chores according to their ages. These chores usually involve driving away birds and insects that destroy rice, and for the older children 15 and above, planting crops and cutting bushes.

## **MAIN ETHNIC GROUPS**

There are 16 major ethnic groups in Liberia. The ethnic groups, in alphabetical order, are: Bassa, Belle, Dahn (Gio), Dei, Gbandi, Gola, Grebo, Kissi, Kpelle, Krahn, Krao (Kru), Lorma, Mandingo, Mahn (Mano), Mende, and Vai.

The population is spread throughout the country in 15 major administrative areas, called Counties. The official language of Liberia is English. Most Liberians speak one of the 16 ethnic languages.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBERIA**

Liberia's population, currently stands at 3,489,072 million (National Population and Housing Census, 2008) and is growing at an annual rate of 2.1%. According to the 2008 Census, women account for 49.4% of the population, providing an overall sex composition ratio result of 102.3 (men to women). At the County level, there is a general trend toward increasing sex ratios. The lowest sex ratios (signifying more women in the population) were recorded in Lofa and Bong, two counties particularly affected by the conflict, with 93.0 and 97.0 respectively.

## **AGE STRUCTURE**

The population of Liberia is young. Over half (55.6%) is below the age of 20 years. Children less than 15 years old account for 46.8% of the population; children less than 5 years account for 14.4%, while children 0-9 years constitute approximately 66.5% of the total child population. Child-dependency stands at 94.0% and old-age dependency is 6.9%. Thus, the total dependency in the population is high at 100.9%; this means that for every 100 adults of working age, there are about 100.9 persons to be fed, clothed, educated and provided medical care. The dependency burden is actually much heavier, in view of the very high unemployment rate.

## **POPULATION GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION**

Liberia's population growth pattern is influenced by five factors: (a) high fertility rates (5.2 nationally, 6.2 in rural areas and 3.8 in urban areas) (LDHS 2007); (b) the large population of women of reproductive age; (c) the practice of early marriages – approximately 48% of Liberian girls marry by the age of 18; (d) the widespread practice of polygamy, particularly in rural Liberia; and (e) the generally low utilization of contraceptive services.

The result of the 2007/2008 National Population and Housing Census revealed a change in the average household size from 6.2 persons in 1984 to 5.1 persons in 2008. This change in the average household size suggests that there is now fewer number of people living and eating together and could be attributed to rising urbanization and modernization, education and/or a combination of other factors.

## MIGRATION: RURAL AND URBAN DISTRIBUTION

External migration into Liberia is very minimal and does not contribute significantly to population growth. Liberia has, however, experienced significant internal migration from rural to urban areas following the war. Despite this, an estimated 69% of households are still classified as rural (CWIQ 2007; as cited in PRS, 26).

This rapid urbanization trend raises concern as productive people lose cultural ties with their local communities and struggle to assimilate in urban centers, often lacking in functional literacy and numeric and commercial skills. Two undesirable consequences of this migration trend include: (a) high population density in urban centers leading to slums, decay, and crime; and (b) the undermining of rural agricultural production and income generation on account of the premature and unplanned loss of productive labor on farms in rural communities. Given the lack of skills of the migrants, and the inability of the formal sector of the economy to rapidly create jobs, as well as inadequate support to promote informal trading and other micro-income generating activities, this migration trend poses a threat to social stability.

## MORTALITY RATES

Although several key health indicators have improved since the end of the conflict, they still remain poor. Infant and under-five mortality rates have fallen sharply since 1999/2000 (as shown in Table 1), which are attributable to the end of the conflict, restoration of basic services in some areas and increased immunization.

Maternal mortality remains staggeringly high and appears to have increased in recent years. Currently estimated at 994 deaths per 100,000 live births (2007), this rate is among the worst in the world.

**Table 1: Mortality Rates**

*Source: LDHS 2007 and LDHS 1999/2000 (as cited in PRS, 31)*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>1999/00</i>	<i>2007</i>
Infant (per thousand)	117	72
Under 5 (per thousand)	194	111
Maternal (per 100,000 live births)	578	994

## ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

The damage and negative consequences of the conflict have been enormous for Liberia. Commercial and productive activities ceased as various warlords looted and vandalized the country. Families were shattered; entire communities were uprooted, while the social,

political, economic and traditional governance systems were destroyed. The economy completely collapsed with GDP falling by 90 percent between 1987 and 1990, one of the largest economic collapses ever recorded in the world. By the time of the elections in 2005, average income in Liberia was just one-quarter of what it had been in 1987, and just one-sixth of its level in 1979.

The decline was felt in Liberia's most important sectors: agricultural production dropped as people fled and infrastructure collapsed, mining and timber shut down, rubber plantations closed, manufacturing essentially stopped and services grounded to a halt. Production of iron ore and timber, as well as mining and panning, ceased completely. Rice production fell 76 percent between 1987 and 2005; financial services fell 93 percent, and electricity and water fell 85 percent. Transportation and communication, trade and hotels, and construction all fell around 69 percent. Only the production of charcoal and wood increased as Liberians turned to these products to meet their basic energy needs.

Basic infrastructures were destroyed during the conflict leaving many roads impassable; this has posed a serious constraint on the economy, as well as the provision of basic services such as education and health. There was no electricity or piped water in the country for 15 years until the Government began to address this in 2006 in the capital of Monrovia.

Public finances collapsed with annual revenue falling to US\$85 million, allowing per capita public expenditure of about US\$25, one of the lowest levels in the world. The Government defaulted on its debts in the mid-1980s, and by 2006 external debt had soared to US\$4.5 billion, equivalent to 800 percent of GDP and 3,000 percent of exports. Domestic debt and arrears added an additional US\$900 million, of which about US\$300 million was ultimately deemed valid by external auditors.

The Government of Liberia is dedicated to revitalizing the economy and promoting economic growth from which all Liberians will benefit. The Government has been reviewing and renegotiating the operations and concessions of all forestry contracts. In 2006, negotiations were completed with ArcelorMittal and the Firestone Rubber Company to increase the benefits for the Liberian people. Tools and seeds have been distributed throughout the rural areas to jumpstart post-conflict agricultural production and a new agreement was reached to re-start palm oil production. The Government has also made strong progress in dealing with its debt by clearing its long-standing arrears to the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the IMF, signing a new three-year agreement with the IMF and reaching the Decision Point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' (HIPC) Initiative.

These initial achievements lay the foundation for strong economic growth rates in the upcoming years: Current estimates produced in conjunction with the IMF suggest that economic growth is expected to accelerate to 9.6% in 2008, 10.3% in 2009, and 145.8% in 2010 before tapering off to 12.3% in 2011. This growth will be driven primarily by the reopening of the forestry and mining sectors, complimented by construction and other services (PRS Chapter 1).

Women comprise 54% of the total labor force (informal and formal). 90% of female workers and 75% of male workers are clustered in the low productivity sectors of informal and agricultural work (CWIQ 2007). In 2007, agriculture contributed 56% of Liberia's GDP. Although the agricultural sector will grow over the next few years, its relative contribution to GDP will drop, as the forestry and mining sectors drive the majority of Liberia's economic growth (PRS Chapter 7).

## **AVERAGE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS**

In spite of the abundance of natural resources and the economic growth prospects for the country, the great challenge for Liberia remains its overwhelmingly dismal state after the conflict. GDP per capita is estimated at US\$190 or 63.8% and 1.7 million Liberians live below the poverty line; 48% of the population lives in extreme poverty.

About 70 percent of schools were destroyed during the war and although enrolment has increased by 82 percent in the past 2 years, the rates are still low (38 percent net primary enrolment for boys and 37 percent for girls; 16 percent secondary school enrolment for boys and 14 percent for girls). Adult literacy rates are 69% for men and 41% for women across the country with the rural literacy rate for men doubling that of women (61% vs 31%) (CWIQ 2007).

## ***POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE***

### **MODERN SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE**

Liberia has a Republican form and a unitary system of Government. The Government is patterned after the United States. It has three Branches-the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial. Each Branch has a separate Head. The Executive Branch is headed by the President; the Legislative Branch is headed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and has two Chambers- the House of Representatives and the House of Senate. The former is headed by the Speaker, while the latter is headed by the President Pro-Tempore. When aggregated, it becomes the Legislative Branch, headed by the Speaker of the House. The third Branch is the Judicial and is headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The Constitution clearly prescribes distinct, specific, and general responsibilities of each Branch and is therefore mandated to operate in a coordinated but independent fashion.

### **PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD**

During the pre-colonial period, the Southeastern Region had a system often described "as cephalous". It was a system void of central authority, and therefore, authority was dispersed amongst the various Clans or Chiefdoms consisting of people who traced themselves to one ancestry. Leaders arose only during the time of crisis but did not have the authority to impose rules or laws, let alone enforce them. When a crisis of that kind ceased a leader who arose

during the crisis would return to the status quo, though he may continue to be influential but without rule making or enforcement powers.

In the Northern and Central Regions, on the other hand, attempts were made to form loose Confederations among several clans and/or chiefdoms; however these attempts were short-lived, with shifting and negligible success. Along the coast, particularly in the Southeast, the tribes engaged in extensive traveling and seafaring, thus putting them more into contact with other indigenous Africans and with European explorers and slave traders.

### **COLONIAL PERIOD (1822-1839)**

The colonial period is an epoch when the first group of settlers arrived in Liberia, from the United States of America, and they established themselves along the Liberian coast. The group responsible for this migration was the American Colonization Society (ACS). Primary among the reasons for migrating to Africa were:

- To minimize the possibilities for racial blending as more slaves became freed;
- To curtail the problem of unemployment, with its attending social unrest and instability;
- To establish a beachhead for Christianizing or civilizing people in Africa;
- To declare independence;

ACS acquired from the indigenous chiefs of the Bassa and Dey chiefdoms its first settlement (piece of land) the Cape of Montserrado and the present-day site of Monrovia, between 1821 and 1823. The acquisition of this settlement was followed by the acquisition of additional settlements by the settlers or colonialists. These additional settlements included Virginia Caldwell, Brewerville, Royesville, Louisiana, and Clay Ashland, amongst others. Also, other colonization societies in America acquired lands and established other colonies: Maryland, Sinoe and Bassa Colonies. The settlers had the right to elect members of the Colonial Council and to choose a Deputy Governor to assist the Colonial Agent. The Colonial Government was headed by an Agent appointed by ACS or parent groups in the United States. The first colonial constitution, instituted in 1825 in the Monrovia Colony, provided for some participation of the settlers in the Government.

### **THE COMMONWEALTH PERIOD (1839-1847)**

Upon arrival in Liberia, the settlers began a process of establishing a Government on the model of what they saw in the United States of America.

The colonies – Monrovia, Bassa and Sinoe – formed a Commonwealth of Liberia in 1839 through a new Constitution that provided for the settlement to be headed by a Governor to be appointed by ACS. The Constitution gave the settlers the right to elect or be elected to the position of Deputy Governor, and to enact laws, subject to veto by the Governor. They were

also allocated seats on the Colonial Council and in 1840 were extended the right to elect or be elected Governor. During this period, the court system was installed, the franchise defined, laws enacted, and internal administrative machinery established. Unfortunately, the indigenous people were excluded from participation in decision-making, as they were not bonafide citizens of the Commonwealth.

Twenty-five years after its establishment, Liberia declared independence in 1847. The Constitution of 1847 marks the beginning of the Republic of Liberia.

## **TYPE OF GOVERNMENT**

### **SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE**

Liberia has a democratic republican form of Government whereby “All power is inherent in the people” (article 1 of the Liberian Constitution). Liberia is divided into fifteen Sub-political and Administrative Divisions called Counties. Each County has at least five county administrative and two statutory districts. At these levels and downwards, the governance structure becomes ambiguous and difficult to manage. There are two parallel lines of operation and authority. One line is based on customary administrative practices, comprising of Districts, headed by Commissioners, followed by a line of Chiefs and Paramount Chiefs, who are the heads of chiefdoms, Clan Chiefs, the head of Clans, Town Chiefs, and the Head of Towns and Quarters. The other structure is Municipal, with cities headed by City Mayors and Townships headed by Township Commissioners. The Constitution provides for a unitary form of Government, which comprises of Three Branches: Legislative, Executive and Judicial.

### **THE GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE FUNCTIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

The Legislative Branch comprises of the House of Senate and the House of Representatives. The House of Senate is headed by the President “Pro-Tempore” who presides in the absence of the President of the Senate (the Vice President). Senators are elected (two senators per county) for a term of nine years by registered voters. The House of Representatives is headed by the “Speaker”. The Representatives are elected by their constituencies for a period of six years. Each constituency is based on population, geographic and other factors. The number of representatives from each County is equal to the number of constituencies. The chief function of the Legislative Branch is to make Laws.

The Executive Branch is headed by the President of the Republic, who is elected by registered voters for a six-year term, along with a Vice President. The chief function of the Executive Branch is to execute or administer the law. The Executive Branch therefore comprises of several different machineries to assist the President, at both the national and local levels.

National-level machineries include essentially Ministries, Autonomous Agencies, and Public Corporations/Enterprises whose Heads are appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. At the local sub-divisional level, the machineries essentially include local administration at the County, District, Chiefdom, Clan, City, Borough and Township. The Administrative Heads of the Counties and Districts are appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the House of Senate, while those of the Chiefdoms, Clans, Cities, etc. are elected by the local population.

The Judicial Branch is headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who serves along with four Associate Justices. The Chief Justice is appointed for life by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Judicial Branch is chiefly responsible to interpret the law and to administer justice or the adjudication of justice.

### **GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The judicial framework of Liberia consists of the circuit courts, criminal courts, magisterial and juvenile courts, and the justice of the peace courts. The justice system operates in all of the Political Sub-Divisions of the country.

The Administrative framework is headed by the Minister of Justice and Attorney-General who, as Chairman of the Joint Security, collaborates with the Ministers of Defense and National Security, the National Security Agency and the Liberia Human Rights Commission to ensure a free and transparent dispensation of justice for all. The Ministry of Justice is charged with the responsibility to prosecute cases as well as to enforce of the laws to promote, enhance and protect the human rights of all.

It is the duty of the Minister of Justice to institute all legal proceedings necessary for law enforcement. The Minister supervises the activities of the Liberia National Police, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, National Fire Service, and the correctional system and the treatment of prisoners through the Rehabilitation Department.

The roles and responsibilities of these agencies are as follow:

The Liberia National Police preserves the peace, protects life and property; ensures the recovery of lost or stolen property; arrests violators of the law; prevents crime; enforces all laws and ordinances; testifies in court; defends and upholds the laws of the State; protects the human and legal rights of persons; and protects the rights of detainees;

The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization under the overall supervision of the Ministry of Justice is responsible for administration of the law, relative to naturalization, entry, deportation and registration of aliens;

The Liberian National Fire Service oversees the operations of an effective firefighting Institution and takes all necessary measures for fire prevention and control.



## **DEFENSE**

Subject to the authority and direction of the President of Liberia, as Commander-In-Chief of the Army, the Ministry of National Defense has complete authority over the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), including all matters relating to their training and the development of an army in terms of preparedness and effectiveness. The President however, makes all military appointments. The Ministry of Defense supervises operations of the militia and coordinates its activities with the National Defense Program.

The National Security Agency coordinates the activities of all security and law-enforcement Agencies in all joint operations.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

The Liberia Human Rights Commission functions independently to further ensure and implement the basic and fundamental rights of the citizens. The Commission does this by remedies available to safeguard human rights, which include: (a) habeas corpus; (b) mandamus; and (c) prohibition.

As part of the national legal system, the international human rights instruments ratified by Liberia are the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified in 1993 and 1998 respectively), as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women and Children (ratified in 2005). The ILO Convention No. 187 concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labor is presently before the National Legislature for ratification.

## **HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF DISCRIMINATION**

The Liberian constitution of 1847 was greatly a replica of the American constitution. It largely adopted the principles of equality and the beliefs of fundamental and inalienable rights of all persons, including the right to choose their leaders and participate in government. These were all lofty principles but some of these principles were meant for, and to be enjoyed by a segment of the society. The Government of Liberia at some point in time did not allow indigenous Liberians, including women, the right to vote and participate in government.

Women were not allowed until the 1940s when they were granted the franchise to vote. This was not the end of the story, as all women whether rural/indigenous or urban settlers were not allowed to vote until 1946, but only if one had property. Indigenous women, notwithstanding, were not permitted to participate in elections until the 1950s. This was a contradiction of the constitution which proclaimed the equality of all people, and the inalienable rights of all its citizens to participate in their governance. If interpreted, the constitution was fashioned in a way favorable to one segment of the society-the property class. Hence in actuality there were three categories of women in Liberia; the settlers' women some of whom owned property and by that standard were qualified to vote; poor settler women who did not have property and

were excluded. There was yet another group, the indigenous women who like their male counterparts could not vote until the 1950s. Hence, in spite of the constitution's stance on the equality of all persons, the political class at the time set aside the real meaning of the equality "doctrine" and therefore ignored the constitution. Certainly this was the beginning of the discrimination of all Liberian women which in a way reinforced the already existing cultural bias against women.

Liberia has emerged from a decade of civil crisis. The crisis ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed in Accra, Ghana in 2003 between the Government of Liberia, the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), political parties and Civil Society Organizations. As a result of and in fulfillment of the terms of the CPA, a two-year Interim Government was installed to lay the groundwork for amongst others, democratically conducted elections. On October 15, 2005 the general and Presidential elections were held in accordance with the terms of the CPA and Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President of Liberia.

The election of a female president certainly represents great progress for a society that has been historically plagued by political discrimination against women. However, as further described in this report, this is merely a step of progress on a long journey to eliminating discrimination against women.

Liberia's Electoral System is the result of a constitutional requirement, the Liberian Election Law of 1986 and the CPA of 2003, as well as International Conventions, treaties, standards and relevant agreements to which the Government is a party. Additionally, it became necessary to formulate policies and protocols for the purpose of guiding the entire electoral process. The code of conduct for the political parties and contestants was an example of such documents.

Of most relevance to this report is Article XXVIII of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement which called for gender balance in all positions in the National Transitional Government of Liberia. This assertion was a great opportunity for women to participate in the political process. However it was not adhered to.

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

The Constitution of Liberia is the supreme law of the country. It is on the basis of the Constitution that a law can be determined legal or illegal. Thus by extension, all treaties, conventions, and protocols to which Government is a signatory must, therefore, be in harmony with the Constitution. A violation of any provision of the Constitution renders all such documents null and void, abignitio. A scrutiny of the Convention does not indicate any violation of the Constitution.

Since the Constitution seems not to be violated, the Convention must be seen substantively as an extension of the Constitution particularly as it relates to the protection and promotion of the rights of the population. Whether or not the Convention exclusively focuses on women is irrelevant, and therefore cannot be a valid hurdle preventing enforcement. For example, Articles 6 and 8 of the Constitution of Liberia affirms the Government and the people of Liberia's stance on the full equality of women and men. Articles 6 and 8 are particularly cleared and forthright on this matter.

Article 6 states:

*The Republic shall, because of the vital role assigned to the individual citizen under this constitution for the social, economic and political well-being of Liberia, provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all citizens to the extent of available resources. Emphasis shall be placed on the mass education of the Liberian people and the elimination of illiteracy.*

Article 8 of the Constitution also adds:

*The Republic shall direct its policy towards ensuring for all citizens without discrimination, opportunities for employment and livelihood under just and humane conditions, and towards promoting safety, health and welfare facilities in employment.*

The non-publication of the Convention therefore, cannot be a valid reason for non-enforcement, and consequently, the granting of women full and equal opportunities in all aspects of our national life.

There is also an extra-territorial judicial system which the Government has signed up to, and therefore to which aggrieved victims of discrimination can take their case. The Supreme Court of ECOWAS was created not only to adjudicate matters between or among states, but also cases affecting the well being and dignity of people in the West Africa Sub-Region. It should be recalled that ECOWAS has signed series of Conventions, treaties and protocols on a wide variety of matters including human rights. Some of such conventions or treaties are the ECOWAS Gender Policy and Protocol, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, etc. Hence, the opportunity to legally and judicially enforce both the substance of the Convention exists at two levels, though perhaps without citing the Convention as a reliance or authority: (1) at the national level, in the courts of Liberia and (2) at the sub-regional level, in the ECOWAS Supreme Court.

However, the Convention has to be domesticated, to conform to non-antagonistic laws that will enhance its enforcement and application. It also requires that it be published, as is required not only by the Foreign Relations law but also the Constitution of Liberia.

### **III. ARTICLE I: DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

*For the purposes of the present Convention, the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.*

#### **DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION**

**3.1.** The Liberian Constitution is the supreme law of the country. As such, it is the source from which all laws derive, including international treaty obligations which are domesticated. Article 2 of the Constitution, in pertinent part, provides: "This Constitution is the supreme and fundamental law of Liberia and its provisions shall have binding force and effect on all authorities and persons throughout the Republic...Any laws, statutes, decrees, customs and regulations found to be inconsistent with it shall to the extent of the inconsistency, be void and of no legal effect."

**3.2.** The Liberian Constitution guarantees equality of men and women and outlaws discrimination on the basis of sex, as per the following articles:

Article 11(b) of the Constitution states: "All persons, irrespective of... sex... are entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, subject to the qualifications as provided for in the Constitution". Article 11 basically means that fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution shall be enjoyed by all persons regardless of sex. Article 11(c) also accentuates the equality of all persons irrespective of sex: "All persons are equal before the law, and therefore, entitled to the equal protection of the law".

**3.3.** Articles 8 and 18 of the Constitution are also pertinent. These are further elaborated under Article 11 of the Convention, Employment and Work.

**3.4.** The CEDAW Convention is not yet domesticated, and discrimination against women is not defined in the Liberian Constitution or in any Liberian statutory law as required under the CEDAW Convention. There are also no laws which explicitly prohibit, or protect women from discrimination, or specifically mandate equality of rights between men and women.

**3.5.** States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:

#### **IV. ARTICLE 2: OBLIGATIONS TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION**

*States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:*

*(a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle;*

*(b) To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;*

*(c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;*

*(d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;*

*(e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;*

*(f) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;*

*(g) To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.*

#### **LAWS AND POLICIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY**

**4.1.** While the Constitution guarantees to all persons, regardless of sex, the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms, and although there is no official definition of discrimination and discriminatory practices in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention, Liberia is committed to the promotion of the rights of women through various national laws and policies.

**4.2.** As part of the post-war legal reforms, two major pieces of legislation have been enacted which have made strides towards establishing equality between men and women. Specifically, the amendment of Chapter 14, Section 14.70 and 14.71 of the New Penal Code (2005), the Rape Law outlawing gang rape and stimulating life term sentence for particularly aggressive forms of rape, and the Equal Rights of the Customary Law of 1998, extends rights

of inheritance to women married under Customary Law (the Inheritance Law). The maximum penalty for violation of the Rape Law is a life sentence and the maximum penalty for denying women's rights under the Inheritance Law is L\$1,000.00 (US\$16.00). Apart from these two exceptions, no laws have yet been enacted to specifically address equality between men and women. The Free and Compulsory Education Law is another important step towards women's and girls' equality in education.

**4.3.** Liberia has also adopted a number of critical policies and action plans for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, including the National Gender-Based Violence Plan of Action (2006), the National Health Policy (2007), the Policy on Girls Education (2006), the HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan of Action (2006), as well as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008-2011). These laws, policies, strategies, and action plans will be discussed in greater detail under the respective articles of the Convention.

### **PERSISTENCE, IN PRACTICE, OF DISCRIMINATION**

**4.4.** There is a dual system of law; one is based on Anglo-American Common law largely applied to the modern educated population, while the other is customary law based on unwritten tribal practices for the indigenous sector. The system of dual governance is legalized through the 'Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia (Customary Law)', which applies in the rural areas. As there are sixteen major ethnic groups in Liberia, there are sixteen types of Customary Laws. As a result, women in the rural areas are subjected to a wide range of social and legal regimes and are less protected vis-à-vis their urban counterparts, who are protected by and subject solely to Statutory Law. Customary Law applies in the issues of marriage and inheritance. Customary law is blamed for certain harmful practices, including early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Customary Law does not apply when it conflicts with the Constitution, nor does it apply to matters arising under Criminal Law. In those instances, Customary Law officials are required to refer those matters to the appropriate statutory authorities. In practice, however – especially during the war and the related destruction of legal and judicial systems – adjudication of matters under Customary Law went unchecked by the statutory system.

**4.5.** Since its inauguration, this Government has revitalized virtually all judicial organs, including the police, and undertaken significant reforms for the purpose of dispensing affordable and transparent justice in the country. The system of adjudicating customary law is also an essential component which is being addressed. For instance, in the rural areas a practice called trial by ordeal/sassy wood is widely administered to extract confessions or admission of guilt from alleged offenders; women have disproportionately been at the receiving end of this heinous practice. One of the reforms which government has instituted is the abolition of the trial by ordeal/sassy wood. The Ministry of Internal Affairs in collaboration with the international partners has begun holding consultative workshops for traditional leaders in the 15 counties on challenges of eliminating harmful traditional practices. The Ministry of Justice, through the Solicitor General's Office, is also opposed to

trial by ordeal and there has been a shift in prosecutorial policy, aided by training County Attorneys, to ensure an increase in the number of prosecutions of such crimes.

**4.6.** Although the statutory laws prohibit discriminatory practices, they make no specific provisions for protection against discrimination in the private or domestic sphere. However, whilst no specific legal provisions currently are existing prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, the Inheritance Law prohibits the denial of rights, and consequently provides for a fine of L\$1,000.00 Liberian dollars (US\$16.00) for violators. The Labor Laws protect all sexes once employed. The Inheritance Law provides for all rights of the statutory wife to be likewise accorded all the rights of customary wives. The human rights of the customary wife are to be protected. Additionally, the act provides that compulsory marriage of a widow to a deceased husband's kin is unlawful; compulsory wife is prohibited; the recovery of dowry, confession damages and confession names are prohibited; the property (ies) acquired or owned by a customary women either before or during marriage belongs to her exclusive of her husband; and it is unlawful for parents to choose their daughter's husband.

**4.7.** Women's access to justice, particularly in the Counties and rural areas, is very limited and is further hindered by the destruction of courts, inadequate staffing both in law enforcement- and adjudication, inadequate capacity of the existing justice system to process case loads, as well as limited knowledge of rights and negative attitudes of law enforcers. Measures are currently underway by Government to rehabilitate the courts throughout the Country and provide appropriate training for personnel of the justice system, which include prosecutors, judicial officials and paralegals. The Ministry of Justice is also taking steps to improve access to justice. Initiatives include the planned creation of the Roving Prosecution Unit to assist in the prosecution of cases in the Counties, the establishment of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Crimes Unit; recommended appointment of qualified County Attorneys; as well as ongoing skills improvement by way of training and developing a prosecution manual, concentrated upon the prosecution of SGBV crimes. The Ministry of Justice is also continuing to assess and work to improve prosecution services.

**4.8.** Improved enjoyment of human rights and protection of civilians including women and children, through the deployment and presence of human rights monitoring bodies throughout Liberia is evident. The establishment of parallel community-driven protection and human rights monitoring mechanisms also serve as preventive and protective measures.

**4.9.** Currently, legal aid is not available in civil cases. However, some assistance is provided by non-governmental organizations. For example, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL), a non-governmental organization that advocates for the rights of women, provides free legal services to women, in particular to survivors of rape. AFELL also helps women who are being denied property rights due to their inability to seek legal redress. On the other hand, through the GBV Unit, the Ministry of Gender and Development provides assistance to women who are victims of various forms of gender based violence by intervening so that the interests of women litigants can be fully protected. Often the strategy is to amicably resolve disputes without prejudice to the rights and interest of women litigants.

## **SANCTIONS OR PENALTIES FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

**4.10.** There are currently no specific sanctions in place for discrimination against women.

## **MEASURES NECESSARY TO ADVANCE OR IMPROVE THE SITUATION OF WOMEN**

**4.11.** Provisions should be put in place for fully functioning administrative and justice systems, including an independent judiciary and a public service in conformity with international human rights standards, in particular relating to the protection of women. To this end, an Independent Human Rights Commission is being reconstituted to, besides the promotion of the rights of people; provide an opportunity to victims who suffered human right abuses seek redress. Additionally, the capacities of the Ministries of Gender and Development and Justice are being built to proactively protect the rights of all sexes particularly that of women. A Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Crimes Unit is also being established at the Ministry of Justice to provide Government with the necessary capacity to prosecute SGBV Crimes as well as ensure that GBV survivors have access to justice. Staffed by Ministry of Justice attorneys and prosecutorial investigators specially trained in SGBV crimes, this Unit will investigate and prosecute criminal cases arising from incidents of sexual assaults and abuse, incest, rape, gang rape, and sexual exploitation, with particular focus on cases involving adolescents and child victims. As part of the creation of this Unit, a prosecutorial manual, concentrated upon the prosecution of SGBV crimes, is being drafted. In addition, Special Courts are being established within the judiciary to speedily try rape cases.

**4.12.** There is a pressing need for a comprehensive law review and a plan for reform and drafting of new laws. Such effort could include, among others, the enactment of an equality law to address some existing gaps, such as the gaps in certain definitions. A Law Commission will be established in 2008 to review existing laws and initiate the removal of any discriminatory and contradictory laws in the protection of fundamental freedoms and rights as enshrined in the Constitution. A Constitutional reform will also be undertaken during the period of 2008-2011, as foreseen in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Human Rights Department of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is conducting a law review. All of these planned and ongoing initiatives are intended to mainstream gender sensitivities not only in the process, but also the contents of the legal instrument that may be produced from the various initiatives. It is thus hoped that when the exercises are completed and implemented, the discrimination and relegation of women will be removed so that women will be given their rightful place in society and ultimately improve their lots.

## **V. ARTICLE 3**

*States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women , for the purpose of guaranteeing them the*



*exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.*

## **MECHANISMS AND INSTITUTIONS**

### **MINISTRY OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT**

**5.1.** In 1995, a Women and Children Unit was established at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs to highlight the issues of women and children and promote the advancement of women and children in Liberia.

**5.2.** This Unit existed until 2001 when the Ministry of Gender and Development was created by an Act of the Legislature (Gender and Development Act) which amended the existing executive law by giving the Ministry of Gender and Development the Mandate to ensure the advancement and welfare of women and the growth and development of children.

**5.3.** The Act defined the Mandate of the Ministry of Gender and Development and added that the Ministry is the lead agency to “coordinate the Government wide gender mainstreaming efforts, focusing on gender equality, women’s empowerment and the development of children.”

**5.4.** The role of the Ministry of Gender and Development as the lead agency includes the following:

- Policy coordination
- Information sharing
- Building consensus
- Providing guidance in harmonizing sector programs with National Gender Policy objectives
- Advocacy and lobbying
- Mobilization of resources for the implementation of the National Gender Policy.

**5.5.** In the implementation of its Mandate, the Ministry works with many Government Ministries and Agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations, and the various women organizations/groups, community and faith-based organizations and communities throughout the Country.

**5.6.** Despite the multiplicity of players in gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment, there are serious gaps in terms of the available human resource capacity to effectively mainstream gender in sectoral policies, plans, and programs. Translating Government’s commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment in Liberia requires capacity strengthening in gender analysis, planning and implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation at all levels.

**5.7.** The new Liberia presents fresh opportunities for bridging existing inequalities between women and men in all sectors and all spheres. The political goodwill and leadership for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and advancement in Liberia is clearly evident.

### **RESOURCES OF THE MINISTRY OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT**

**5.8.** The Ministry of Gender and Development has the statutory responsibility to implement gender related programs and to ensure that gender forms a part of the national development agenda. To carry out its Mandate budgetary support is provided by the Government of Liberia. Budget allocation for the Fiscal Year 2006/2007 was US \$767,994; US\$ 995,436 was allocated for Fiscal Year 2007/2008 and US\$ 1,084,447 for 2008/09.

**5.9.** Other technical and financial support is provided by donor governments, multilateral and bilateral Institutions, including the UN System, and International non-governmental organizations.

### **STAFFING/CAPACITY OF THE MINISTRY OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT**

**5.10.** The Ministry of Gender and Development is headed by a Cabinet Minister appointed by the President. The Minister is assisted by two Deputy Ministers, two Assistant Ministers, Directors, Coordinators, and Section Heads, Planning and Research Officers and other professional personnel. Currently, the MoGD is understaffed, and lacks adequate trained staff and logistics to effectively carry out its Mandate.

**5.11.** Currently, there are fifteen Gender County Coordinators assigned to the fifteen political sub-divisions. Each County Coordinator is supported by two additional staff members. Logistics for effective implementation of the Ministry's Mandate by the County Coordinators remain a great challenge for the Ministry.

### **OTHER MECHANISMS FOR PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN**

**5.12.** The Ministry has also succeeded in establishing **Gender Focal Points** in the line Ministries/Agencies of Government. The Gender Focal Points are to coordinate efforts as well as ensure appropriate strategic direction for the promotion of gender mainstreaming in the planning and budgeting processes at the sectoral level. The Gender Focal Points also serve as members of the National Gender Forum.

**5.13.** In addition, they function as in-house gender advisers and serve as the link between the national gender machinery and sector agencies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in national policies, plans, and programs.

**5.14.** The **National Gender Forum** was established in 1998 and comprises all stakeholders involved in gender related programs. The Forum serves as the Policy Advisory Body to

ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all sectors and forms a part of the national agenda, and formulate policy guidelines. The Forum is chaired by the President of Liberia and consists of Ministers and Heads of Agencies and other Branches of Government, Local and International NGOs, Institutions of Higher Learning, and the UN system. The Forum is patterned after the twelve critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

**5.15.** In September 1998, the Women's and Children's Unit of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs supported the establishment of a **Women NGOs Secretariat** which serves as the body to complement the efforts of the Ministry to promote gender equality and the advancement of women.

**5.16.** The National Legislature has a **Women's Legislative Caucus** that plays a key role in advancing women's concerns and issues for national legislation. It also has the Committee on Gender, Women, Children and Health.

**5.17. Development Partners** support the Ministry of Gender and Development in a catalytic role for gender mainstreaming in all Government Ministries and Agencies. The United Nations Development Fund for Women has been crucial in providing technical assistance and support to MoGD to effectively execute its Mandate of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Liberia.

**5.18.** The **UN Gender Theme Group**, a coalition of all UN Agencies in Liberia, is a key player in advancing gender equality and women's advancement, especially through UN support programs in the country.

**5.19. Civil Society Organizations** (including local and international NGOs, CBOs, FBOs,) play crucial role both in advocacy and direct service delivery for women's legal, economic, and socio-cultural empowerment organizations in Liberia. MoGD records/reports indicate that there are over 100 women's Organizations/Groups in Liberia.

## **GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES AND GENDER EQUALITY ASPECTS IN OTHER POLICIES**

**5.20.** The Government of Liberia has a wide range of policy instruments reflecting its commitment to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The Government has already undertaken many initiatives to address issues affecting women and girls.

### ***POLICIES PROMOTING WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT***

#### **NATIONAL GENDER POLICY FRAMEWORK**

**5.21.** The Ministry of Gender and Development, supported by UNECA, initiated the process of drafting a National Gender Policy. This objective was partly achieved and a comprehensive gender policy framework was formulated which will provide the main

guideline for the development of a National Gender Policy. Under the PRS, the Ministry is expected to fully develop the National Gender Policy within the next few months.

**5.22.** The Ministry with technical and financial support from key partners has developed a framework for developing a national action plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Tangible efforts have been made in Liberia in respect of the incremental implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 passed on 31 October, 2000 in general respects. For instance, the Ministry of Gender and Development is charged with the responsibility of developing policies for the protection and advancement of women. The Ministry has taken a proactive role in mainstreaming gender and the placement of women in key decision making positions and bodies. Additionally Government has adopted several initiatives, such as the various scholarships schemes, and the literacy and skills training programs, all of which are intended to address in part, the special needs of women. These initiatives are pioneering programs, and thus, it is hoped that when the National Action Plan is developed, programs would be designed to ensure that women's peace, security, and protection are adequately addressed.

#### **NATIONAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PLAN OF ACTION**

**5.23.** The Ministry of Gender and Development has developed a National Gender Based Violence Plan of Action, and has accordingly established a GBV Unit. It has committed to fulfilling its obligations under ratified and signed international treaties, and established a Unit to monitor and report on the steps taken to meet these obligations. Liberia passed a Rape Law in 2005, which explicitly specifies that rape is a criminal offense. (Further information on the Plan of Action is provided in the Section-Violence Against Women.)

#### **NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY**

**5.24.** The Ministry of Education and other stakeholders, including the Ministry of Gender and Development, are in the process of reviewing and revising the National Girls Education Policy and Education for All Policy to ensure gender equality.

#### **NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY**

**5.25.** The National Health Policy was revised on December 5, 2007 and the National Health Strategic Plan is the instrument formulated to implement this policy. The Health Policy and Plan incorporate the needs and sensitivities of women as highlighted under Article 12 of this report.

#### **LIBERIA POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY (PRS)**

**5.26.** The PRS of Liberia which covers the period July 2008 – June 2011 and lays the groundwork for the achievement of gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment, and equitable access to resources and benefits. In the economic realm, the PRS incorporates

gender equality considerations in the development and implementation of macro-and microeconomic policies, as well as programs underpinning the overall growth strategy, with the ultimate goal of promoting women's economic empowerment. It intends to build a more effective, responsive, and supportive legal, social and political environment.

**5.27.** The PRS further includes measures for the prevention of and response to GBV. It addresses the root causes of the crime and promotes a wider participation of women in national security institutions. It also reinforces the institutional framework, capacity and Mandate of the Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) to take the lead in developing, implementing and monitoring the National Gender Policy, the PRS, and International Conventions, as well as to mainstream gender in legal, constitutional, and governance reforms. The Government is committed to ensuring that key PRS monitoring data collected are disaggregated by age and sex, where relevant, which will facilitate MDG monitoring and the development of internationally comparable data.

**5.28.** The PRS aims to create the enabling environment to support and expand women's and girls' economic role, and in turn their contributions to the revitalization of the economy by focusing on four areas: increasing women's productivity and capacity; supporting and expanding women's role in the rural and urban value chain; increasing women's participation in non-traditional segments of the economy and the labor market; and, strengthening Liberia's institutional capacity for gender and economic policy analysis and formulation.

**5.29.** It is recognized that women are important in ensuring the security of Liberia. The Government's Security Sector Reform under the PRS is intended to establish mechanisms to protect the fundamental freedom of Liberians. To that end, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), Liberia National Police (LNP) and Bureau of Corrections will champion human rights and gender equality. Institutional reform will ensure adoption of gender justice and equality as core values and allow for equal access and protection.

**5.30.** With respect to governance and the rule of law, the central goal is to fully guarantee women and men equality in the enjoyment of their human rights. The aim of good governance is to enable full and equal access to all citizens. This is fundamental to the fight against inequity and thus poverty, as it allows for citizens' participation in decisions on resource control, access and allocation. As Liberia takes measures to reconstruct itself into an equitable democratic nation, addressing issues of structural inequality and marginalization of women is critical. To encourage women's participation in governance processes and strategies will include developing and adopting policies in all Public Institutions and Government Agencies to address gender inequities, including codes of conduct, sexual harassment policy, human resources policy, domestic violence policy, and non-discrimination policies.

**5.31.** In the area of education, the Government is committed to providing universal primary education and implementing the National Action Plan 2004-2015: Education for All, and has

prioritized girls' education through the National Girls Education Policy. The dropout rate for girls is particularly high across the country.

**5.32.** The two decades of conflict devastated the health sector. Of the 325 health facilities prior to the war, about 95 percent were partially or wholly destroyed. Liberia has already developed a National Health Policy (2007), which provides for a Basic Package of Services at all levels of health care. Though the National GBV Plan of Action lays out various systematic interventions for the prevention and response to GBV and care support for GBV survivors, the Government will ensure that the National Health Policy is gender-sensitive and responds to the needs of GBV survivors through developing and implementing guidelines for gender-sensitive health care, including training programs for health care personnel, to foster attitudinal change and provide humanistic health care, with a particular emphasis on women and children in general and GBV survivors in particular.

#### **VI. ARTICLE 4: ACCELERATION OF EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

*Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.*

*2. Adoption by States Parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.*

**6.1.** This article seeks to address temporary special measures aimed at accelerating equality between women and men, which should not be seen as discriminatory but as a means to create equal opportunities for both men and women.

**6.2.** The 1847 Liberian Constitution and its revised version of 1986 do not clearly state the use of affirmative actions to ensure de facto equality between women and men. However, the Government of Liberia has adopted, through policy and other temporary measures, to ensure de facto equality particularly in the areas of education, political participation and in the security sector.

#### **SPECIAL MEASURES IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR**

**6.3.** To reduce the current gender disparities in the education system and its consequences on women's advancement, the Government developed, through the Ministry of Education, a National Policy on Girls Education within the framework of the Master Plan adopted in 2006. This policy is described in detail under Article 10.

**6.4.** A private trust, The Liberia Education Trust Fund, conceived by the President in 2005, has initiated the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Scholarship for females to study the sciences abroad. In February 2008, twenty females took an eligibility test for admission to schools in America. The results are yet to be announced. Additionally, with support from the World Food Program, the Government is providing take-home food rations to girls above the age of fifteen years in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades. The food ration is intended to supplement their nutritional needs, and thereby encourage them to stay in school.

**6.5.** To increase the number of literate women, skills training centers and adult literacy programs specifically for women have been set up in the various counties. The number of women who have benefited from skills training programs was not available up to the writing of this report; however, a total of 11,703 women were enrolled in adult literacy classes in 2006/2007.

### **SPECIAL MEASURES IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

**6.6.** The Electoral Law that came into force in 2005 did not include a quota system or any specific provision to increase the representation of women as candidates despite the many draft proposals for the amended electoral laws. However, the 2005 electoral procedures and guidelines directed the inclusion of at least 30% women on political party candidates' lists. Once the electoral guidelines were established, UNMIL and other International Organizations undertook to train political party representatives and women on how to respond to this development.

**6.7** Many women in the women's wings within the political parties took advantage of the guidelines to contest for their party's nominations. The outcome was mixed with some political parties making efforts to include women as candidates on their party lists, while others were, however, reluctant to include female candidates. The proposal on the 30% quota for women representation in all political parties was not adhered to, as the guideline had no legal basis. Only one out of 22 political parties adhered to this.

**6.8** Women voters and aspirants expressed the view that historically women were prevented from participating as candidates and as voters due to intimidation and violence perpetrated against women and exacerbated by the war. The development of a Code of Conduct was therefore an important tool to guide the political parties and candidates during the campaign and voting so as not to marginalize women by violence, fraud and intimidation. The Code of Conduct was voluntarily developed by Registered Political Parties with technical support from the International Republican Institute (IRI), encouraged by the National Elections Commission and facilitated by Development Consultants of Liberia. Civil society groups including women NGOs also participated in drafting the Code of Conduct. The draft was submitted to the UNMIL Office of the Gender Adviser, for review and the inclusion of a gender perspective relating to media reporting, public information documents, upholding sanctions for breach of the code of conduct and protection of women. The political parties specifically agreed to the principle of non-discrimination, commitment to refrain from

abusive language, incitement on the basis of sex and gender, and to enforce the Code of Conduct by reprimanding offenders and to resort to legal action. These guidelines served as a source of confidence, support and protection for women.

## **SPECIAL MEASURES IN THE SECURITY SECTOR**

**6.9.** The Liberian Security Sector is male dominated. This is because of the various stereotypes and lack of awareness on the roles of women in the security sector. The Liberian Government has a strategy to promote women's rights and participation in all sectors. The Liberia Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (2007-2008) document requires that at least 20% female recruitment in the security sector. In achieving this deliverable, the Liberian National Police (LNP) put in place special measures to raise the academic standard of female recruits to attain the required level of education for recruitment in the LNP Academy. An accelerated learning program targeting females who did not have the requisite academic credentials to join the Police was initiated and 300 females benefited.

## **VII. ARTICLE 5: SEX ROLE STEREOTYPING**

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:*

*(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;*

*(b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.*

## **CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL PRACTICES**

**7.1.** Gender inequality and women's marginalization in Liberia are entrenched in traditional and religious perceptions that portray women as the weaker sex. There is a high social and cultural tolerance and support for female subordination and male superiority, which enhances social and economic disparities. Negative social and cultural attitudes and perceptions against women's role in society limit women's participation in management and decision making at all levels. These perceptions, sustained and maintained by the traditional and cultural system of socialization, are transferred to the schools, communities and the workplace. It is this which in reality, determines and maintains the rigid gender based division of labor and gender roles; the inequalities within the inheritance and property rights systems; women's limited access to and low participation in leadership and decision making positions; and girls' low participation in education. It is this system of gender beliefs and practices that promote gender inequality and discrimination.



## **EXPECTED ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE FAMILY**

**7.2.** The existing division of labor in a typical Liberian household reveals that women are mainly responsible for cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children and other members of the household including the sick. Men are responsible for the overall supervision and leadership in the home. Traditionally, they are the heads of the household. Men usually are the “breadwinners” in the family and they are regarded as such by society. Women’s contribution to the family’s upkeep is usually not recognized.

**7.3.** Women are hampered by various constraints, which limit their participation and advancement in society:

- a) Customary laws and norms which impede women to a greater extent than men, from obtaining land, credit, productive inputs, and information;
- b) Gender bias in access to basic human resource development services such as education, training, and health care.
- c) Harmful traditional practices such as FGM affect the emotional stability and health of women and young girls in the cultural societies.
- d) Long-standing cultural practices, which allow for the parents of a girl to select her future husband and force her into early marriage,
- e) Time poverty, resulting from women’s multiple and competing reproductive and productive responsibilities. These are usually performed without the assistance of labor-saving technology, and adequate transportation.

## **STEREOTYPES IN SCHOOL BOOKS AND THE MEDIA**

**7.4.** Women are portrayed as “mothers” and men as “fathers” in text books. Women are also shown as being wood gatherers and water carriers. Boys and girls are shown in the early stages of development as not sharing these tasks equally. These perceptions are reinforced in the media. For example, West African movies portray women as objects of the men, witches, and sex idols, victims of violence, particularly domestic violence, dependants, illiterate and submissive to men.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAM TO EDUCATE WOMEN ON THEIR RIGHTS**

**7.5.** Over the last few years, NGOs with the support of the Ministry of Gender and Development and the UN system have undertaken numerous awareness raising and sensitization campaigns to address these negative perceptions of women in society. The simplified Rape and Inheritance Laws are used as tools to raise awareness, educate and inform the public on the prevention and response to rape as well as the their rights under the Inheritance Law. Talk shows, radio dramas and spot messages have all been used to educate the public on the need to stop violence against women, including domestic violence. Efforts have been made to construct peace huts or traditional discussion huts (Palava Huts) to provide space for women to discuss their issues in the community. These huts are also

venues to listen to radio programs discussing government plans and policies. These programs have had a high level of success in raising awareness and educating the women to participate in development programs.

## **MEASURES TO CHANGE HARMFUL SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PATTERNS**

**7.6.** Female genital mutilation (FGM) is traditionally performed on young girls in the northern, western, and central parts of Liberia, particularly in the rural areas. Social structures and traditional institutions, such as secret societies or bush schools, often perform FGM as an initiation rite for young girls, making it difficult to ascertain the number of cases. On February 9, 2007, the Minister of Internal Affairs condoned FGM at his confirmation hearings by arguing that it is a cultural practice that should be respected.

**7.7.** Even though there is no law that prohibits FGM, the Ministry of Gender and Development and other partners are encouraging FGM practitioners to abolish the practice by sensitizing them on the harmful effects of the practice. Apart from the awareness campaigns, the Ministry along with its Partners during the National Women's Conference in May 2008, agreed on the way forward to hold a conference for female traditional leaders to discuss the harmful effects of FGM, forced and early marriage of young girls. Women who have decided not to engage in FGM are given loans or grants to engage in alternative income generating activities.

## **EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE STEREOTYPING**

### **CURRICULUM REVISION**

**7.8.** The Government through the Ministry of Education with support from UNESCO has worked on a revised curriculum that eliminates stereotyping. For example in current textbooks women are portrayed as nurses with men as medical doctors and engineers. Steps are underway to revise the text books to portray women as doctors, lawyers and engineers.

**7.9.** Although Government in the 1980's created a movie censorship board, it is not presently active. As a result, movie houses and video clubs screen movies that perpetuate stereotypical images of women.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

### **DATA**

**7.10.** Vicious and systematic acts of sexual violence terrorized Liberians throughout the years of war. According to various assessments done by WHO in collaboration with the Ministries of Gender and Health (2004, 2005, and 2006) 93% of the 2,828 women and girls interviewed from war-affected communities in ten counties (Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Cape Mount, Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Grand Bassa, Montserrado, Margibi, and Sinoe) said they were subjected to

one or multiple acts of abuses and/or sexual violence during the conflict. The assessments targeted women affected by the war. Rape, including gang rape (73% of the total respondents) was the most traumatic experience and often women were assaulted with foreign objects, including flashlight in their vagina or anus. The use of objects led to vesico-vaginal and recto-vaginal fistula representing 15.5% and 8.5% of the cases respectively.

**7.11.** Even following the end of the conflict, rape and sexual violence has been an ongoing problem. Until 2008, no national data was available on the prevalence of various forms of violence against women. The recently released results of the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey provided the following estimations for gender-based violence in Liberia (all estimations for women aged 15 – 49):

**7.12.** 44% of women have experienced physical violence since they were 15 years old and 29% of women experienced physical violence in the past 12 months (LDHS 2007).

**7.13.** Without distinguishing between sexual violence during the conflict and/or after, 17.6% of women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. For those aged 25-39, this rate increased to 22%. Of those experiencing sexual violence, 32% reported it coming from their current husband/partner, 10.2% from their current/former boyfriend and 8.1% from a police/soldier (Note that there is no distinction in the survey between those soldiers during the war years and police/soldiers now). Rape continues to plague the Liberian society with 10% of Liberian women aged 15-49 who have ever had sexual intercourse saying that their first sexual experience was forced against their will (LDHS 2007).

**7.14.** Concerning spousal violence, 36.3% having experienced sexual or physical violence in the past 12 months. 10.8% of ever-married women have experienced sexual violence from their spouse; 35.8% have experienced emotional violence and 35.0% physical violence (LDHS 2007).

## **CONTEXT AND OTHER CONCERNS**

**7.15.** During the conflict, the perpetrators of gender-based violence were mainly fighting forces. However, after the conflict the perpetrators are ex-combatants, community or family members, teachers and husbands/partners.

**7.16.** Sexual exploitation due to poverty particularly by adult men is leading to an extremely high number of teenage pregnancies increasing the number of young women single parents. The economic vulnerability of the females, especially girls, forces them into prostitution and sexual exploitation (exchange sex for goods, food, money, etc. from men who are in positions of power or authority). This, in most instances, makes them susceptible to sexually transmitted infections including HIV. It also leads to school dropout, sexual aversion, and prostitution. In addition, the risk of a sexually abused girl ending up in prostitution is high.

**7.17.** Survivors of gender-based violence should receive the necessary medical and professional counseling; however, many survivors are unwilling/unable to find medical or health professional assistance or to report the assault because of embarrassment, especially in cases of rape. This is compounded with the lack of money / poverty, fear of possible social stigmatization and rejection, limited access to the law and the handling of cases, as well as the lack of confidentiality and empathy in the health facilities and justice system. In addition, impunity of perpetrators of gender-based violence has contributed to women's sense that the issue is not a priority.

**7.18.** Despite the willingness of many health facilities to receive the survivors, they are not sufficiently equipped and lack supplies, drugs, and trained health professionals in the clinical and psychological management of survivors to respond adequately to their specific needs.

### **LEGISLATION AND PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

**7.19.** The Government of Liberia enacted legislation to amend the new Penal Code of June 1976 Chapter 14, Section 14.70 and 14.71 (the Rape Law). This Act states that a person who has sexual intercourse with another person (male or female) without his/her consent has committed rape that is punishable by ten (10) years or lifetime imprisonment depending on the degree of the rape (rape of a minor, rape resulting in serious bodily harm, rape using a weapon, gang rape). The new rape law came into force in January 2006.

**7.20.** Even though the Constitution states that the age of consent is eighteen, young girls are given into marriage at the age of 14 in the rural areas. The inheritance Law also provides that it is unlawful for any customary female under the age of 16 to be given in customary marriage to a man.

**7.21.** The Government, through the court system is implementing the Rape Law. Moreover, the Ministry of Gender and Development provides counseling services, raises awareness, does follow-up on cases and advocates for the prosecution of perpetrators on behalf of the survivors. The Ministry also does referrals to hospitals and takes survivors to safe homes if they do not feel secure in the community.

**7.22.** The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) which was highly instrumental in advocating for the passage of the Rape Law also provides free legal services to survivors, and advocates for the protection, promotion and advancement for the rights of women and children. The Association also creates awareness on the Rape and Inheritance Laws.

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL GBV PLAN OF ACTION**

**7.23.** This Plan of Action which was launched November 2006 is the result of multiple and comprehensive consultations and participatory exercises by all stakeholders, under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender and Development. The process began by conducting a series of assessments to determine and analyze the situation, identify the gaps in prevention

and response, and the strategy to fill those gaps. These efforts culminated into the formulation and adoption of the GBV National Plan of Action to minimize the high rate of GBV in the communities, and to also give quality care to survivors using a multi-sectoral and inter-agency approach. This plan categorizes GBV interventions into five thematic areas: psychological, including economic empowerment of women and girls, health, legal/justice, protection/security, and coordination. Each of the five areas will implement different activities to address fully the specific needs of survivors, as well as women and girls that are vulnerable to GBV, including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).

**7.24.** The Plan of Action is committed to achieving the following:

- a) A system and outreach service in place for psycho-social support, including safe homes and economic empowerment for survivors of GBV, including SEA.
- b) A strengthened health sector for effective and efficient response to GBV case management, diagnostic, documentation and reporting on clinical evidence.
- c) A strengthened criminal justice system where cases of Gender Based Violence are judiciously adjudicated without delay, and where due process is given to survivors and perpetrators of GBV.
- d) A well developed and integrated national protection system with the capacity to prevent and respond effectively and efficiently to GBV.
- e) A strengthened institutional framework for the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the National GBV Plan of Action for the prevention and case management of GBV, including SEA.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GENDER BASED VIOLENCE INTERAGENCY COORDINATION TASK FORCE

**7.25.** The Task Force is headed by the Ministry of Gender and Development and its members are international and local organizations, UN Agencies as well as Government Ministries/Agencies involved in GBV programs. The Task Force was established in October 2003.

**7.26.** The objectives of the task force are:

- To share information and network;
- To design strategies to address all forms of gender-based violence against women and children;
- To prevent and respond to GBV in the country.

#### **GBV Unit at the Ministry of Gender and Development**

**7.27.** The Gender Based Violence Unit at the Ministry of Gender and Development was set up to provide services (counseling, legal, referral) to survivors of gender based violence, collect and analyze data on GBV trends and magnitude, disseminate GBV information, create awareness and provide education on GBV prevention and care; conduct research on GBV to

know the prevalence rate in each county, and effect proper mechanisms to deal with the issues.

**7.28.** To support the smooth and successful consolidation of national efforts geared towards alleviating GBV in the country through the improved coordination of the appropriate prevention and response strategies.

### **RIGHT TO PROTECTION: COLLABORATION WITH POLICE and CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**

**7.29.** The Ministry of Gender and Development, in its efforts to ensure that survivors of gender based violence are protected, works closely with the Women and Children's Unit of the Liberia National Police, Ministry of Justice as well as human rights organizations. Survivors are referred to the Police The Police are also contacted to arrest the perpetrators, as well as ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted.

### **SAFE HOMES**

**7.30.** The Ministry of Gender and Development, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the members of the Taskforce, developed guidelines for the running of safe homes. The safe homes are to provide support and care to survivors of gender-based violence. In addition, survivors are referred to the safe homes that are being operated by some local and international NGOs. The Ministry has mobilized some funds through the Spanish-NEPAD-Fund for African Women to construct one safe home each in 5 counties to enable survivors out of Monrovia receive support and care.

## **XIII. ARTICLE 6: EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN**

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.*

### **LEGISLATION TO PREVENT TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS**

**8.1.** An Anti-Human Trafficking Act was passed in 2005 that prohibits trafficking in persons. However, there are police reports that women are being trafficked within the Country to engage in domestic work, labor, and prostitution. Young children are at a particularly high risk for trafficking. Trafficking victims are usually subjected to harsh living and working conditions.

**8.2.** Under the 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Act, penalties for trafficking range from one year to life imprisonment. Monetary restitution to victims is also provided under the law. Law enforcement efforts are not strong. The law is not widely disseminated among law enforcement officers and judges; and there has been no prosecution of trafficking cases.

**8.3.** The 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Act mandates the President to appoint an anti-trafficking task force, chaired and co-chaired by the Ministries of Labor and Justice respectively. In 2006, an ad-hoc anti-trafficking task force composed of government representatives, international organizations, foreign governments, and local NGOs was set up. This task force is developing an anti-trafficking action plan, which will serve as a guide for the implementation of the Act. The Ministries of Justice and Labor are primarily responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the Act.

**8.4.** Several International and Local NGOs are working with Government to raise awareness about trafficking. The Women and Children Protection Section of the Ministry of Gender and Development continues to address trafficking issues. The Government has limited capacity to provide services to victims. A local NGO however provides shelter for abused women and girls, including trafficking of victims.

## **PROSTITUTION**

**8.5.** Prostitution is illegal under the law. Also the selling of a woman's sexual services by a third person is illegal but is practiced. Prostitution also persists with young women and girls engaging in prostitution for money and food.

**8.6.** It is rather difficult to arrest and prosecute those engaged in prostitution because it is difficult to provide evidence.

## **IX. ARTICLE 7: EQUALITY IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE**

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:*

*(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;*

*(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;*

*(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.*

## **CONSTITUTIONAL/LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND OVERVIEW**

**9.1.** According to the Liberian Constitution Article 77(b), "all elections shall be by secret ballot as may be determined by the National Elections Commission and every Liberian citizen 18 years of age and above shall have the right to be registered as a voter and to vote in public elections and referenda.

**9.2.** Notwithstanding this Constitutional provision, the current situation was characterized by a low number of women being voted for during the elections. As a result, women at various levels of political and public life remain low. This could be attributed to several factors including women's low level of education.

**9.3.** Another factor is women's lack of economic power, as few women have the economic means to participate in elections. In most Liberian homes, the man is considered the provider, and controls the family's income; women usually are not expected to make significant financial decisions. This situation renders women unable to engage in activities that have financial implications such as elections.

**9.4.** A third factor that undermines women's participation in the electoral process is traditional beliefs. In most Liberian cultures, women are not expected to take the lead or speak out in public. They are confined to their domestic activities such as cooking, house cleaning and child bearing. Women are not expected to contest elections or be seen as public figures. This perception has kept many women away from politics. There are also fewer women registered as party members than men. Most women are usually expected to support the party of their husbands' choice.

**9.5.** Civic and voters' education for the 2005 elections was critical to ensure that citizens, political parties and candidates behaved in a way that would encourage peaceful elections, acceptance of election results and tolerance. The presence of trained security personnel at all the voting precincts nationwide created a secured environment, especially for women, who felt intimidated by their male counterparts to cast their votes. In addition, the presence of women security personnel and polling staff at the polling centers encouraged many women to vote.

**9.6.** Efforts to implement temporary special measures in conjunction with the 2005 elections are discussed under article 4, Paragraph 1.

## **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS OF 2005**

**9.7.** Even though women account for 52% of the population, they are not fully involved in the decision-making process. In the 2005 elections, women accounted for only 14% of the 806 candidates nominated for election though they accounted for 50% of the total registered voters. The elections results showed that 5, or 17% of the 30 Senators elected were women, while 9 out of the 64 seats in the House of Representatives were won by women which represented 14%.

**9.8.** Although women's participation is at a very low level, the Electoral Reform Law of 2008, Chapter 7 states that political parties shall encourage minimum representation of women to all elected positions in political parties.



**9.9.** In the Presidential race in 2005, women for the first time in many years contested for the position of President. Four women, constituting 9% of the presidential candidates, contested and one of them won. This is recorded as the highest in the country's history, and was significant as compared to the past.

*Table 2: 2005 Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates*

Total # of Candidates	Male	Female	Percentage Female
44	40	4	9%

**9.10.** During the same elections in 2005, an appreciable number of women contested senatorial seats. At least one female contested in each of the 15 counties. This was both a novelty and for rural women to contest for such positions with their male counterparts.

*Table 3: 2005 Elections: Senatorial Candidates by County*

County	Total # of Candidates	Male	Female	Percentage Female
Bomi	14	12	2	14%
Bong	16	15	1	6%
Gbarpolu	11	10	1	9%
Grand Kru	15	14	1	6%
Lofa	16	15	1	6%
Margibi	16	15	1	6%
River Cess	12	11	1	8%
River Gee	14	12	2	14%
Sinoe	9	7	2	22%
Maryland	14	13	1	7%
Montserrado	18	13	5	27%
Nimba	13	11	2	15%
Grand Bassa	14	12	2	14%
Grand Cape Mount	11	10	1	9%
Grand Gedeh	10	9	1	10%
Total	203	179	24	12%

**9.11.** The competition extended to the lower House of Representatives where the race was even tougher. Table 4 shows the female percentage to their male counterparts.

**Table 4: 2005 Elections: House of Representative Candidates by County**

<b>County</b>	<b>Total # of Candidates</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Percentage Female</b>
Bomi	27	24	3	13%
Bong	47	38	9	24%
Grand Bassa	25	21	4	19%
Gbarpolu	20	18	2	11%
River Gee	16	16	0	0%
Sine	22	10	2	11%
River Cess	15	13	2	15%
Nimba	48	46	2	4%
Montserrado	135	121	14	12%
Margibi	51	30	21	59%
Lofa	30	29	1	3%
Maryland	18	17	1	6%
Grand Gedeh	19	18	1	6%
Grand Kru	14	14	0	0%
Grand Cape Mount	28	26	2	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>12%</b>

**9.12.** Since the 2005 elections, a total of five by-elections have taken place around the country with women taking part, although in small numbers (see Table 5). Only one woman was elected in these by-elections.

**Table 5: By-Elections**

<b>County</b>	<b>Total contestants</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Percentage Female</b>
River Cess	5	4	1	20%
Margibi	4	3	1	25%
Nimba	7	7	0	0%
Grand Bassa	10	10	0	0%
Gbarpolu	9	9	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6%</b>

**9.13.** Although voter registration for the 2005 elections was a difficult exercise, largely because of the lack of reliable data, high illiteracy rate, poor infrastructure, especially roads, it was designed to ensure the participation of women. The question of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was particularly important as women formed a greater number of the displaced than men. Women also formed a greater part of the population involved in small-scale enterprises and petty trade. They viewed the registration process and actual voting as a loss of time and income earned in trading. To address this, the National Election Commission

(NEC) applied special measures and strategically located registration centers close to market places and to farms, as well as used mobile centers for voter registration in some market places and remote areas.

## **WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE**

**9.14.** Article 7 of the Convention also addresses women's participation in the formulation of the Government's policy and its implementation, hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government. This Government has made strides to increase women's participation in government. Women hold senior and junior ministerial positions and are also in key decision-making positions in the public and private sectors.

**9.15.** There are four female Cabinet Ministers, compared to seventeen male Ministers, constituting 21% of the total Cabinet positions (Youth and Sports, Commerce, Gender, and Foreign Affairs). Women comprise approximately one-quarter of the President's appointments into positions of trust (see Table 6).

**9.16.** In local government, women are also very visible. Five of the fifteen county superintendents are women.

**9.17.** Women feature significantly on Special Commissions constituted in the country. On the National Elections Commission which has seven members, the total number of women is three thus constituting 43% of the total membership of the Commission. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has nine members, 44% of whom (four) are women.

**9.18.** On the Supreme Court Bench, two out of the five Associate Justices are women, constituting 40%.

**9.19.** Women are found in nearly every sector of government including the security agencies: the Director of Police, the Police's Principal Deputy, the Deputy Commissioner for Immigration and Naturalization, and the Deputy Governor at the Central Bank are all women. In the Civil Service, women are found in many key positions but the exact statistics or figures are not available.

**9.20.** Although women are found on boards of public corporations and institutions and in trade unions and NGOs, no data is available to provide the exact figures.

*Table 6: Number of women appointed to positions of trust by the President.*

<b>Appointed/Nominated Positions</b>	<b># of Positions</b>	<b># of Appointed/Nominated Males</b>	<b># of Appointed/Nominated Females</b>	<b>Percentage Female</b>
Minister	21	17	4	21%
County Superintendent	15	10	5	33%
Development Superintendent	15	12	3	20%
Chief Justice	1	1	0	0%
Associate Justices	4	2	2	50%
Ambassadors	21	16	5	24%

**X. ARTICLE 8**

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.*

**10.1.** Liberian women have played and continue to play key roles in the diplomatic field representing their Government in various positions in the Foreign Service. The Honourable Mrs. Angie Brooks Randolph, who at the time was Assistant Minister in the Department of State of Liberia, was the first African woman to become President of the twenty-fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in 1969/70. This was an honor for women in general and Liberian women in particular. Many women are proud of her achievement and strive to emulate her example.

**10.2.** Although women formed part of many government delegations in recent times, there are no statistics available to indicate the exact number of women involved.

**10.3** Although there are some Liberian women currently working with international organizations, there are no available data to indicate their exact numbers. This has been the case over many years, as there are records of women like the current President of Liberia who worked with the World Bank and the United Nations for years. The present Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Youth and Sports, and former Minister of Finance also worked with international organizations.

**XI. ARTICLE 9: EQUAL RIGHTS WITH MEN TO NATIONALITY**

*1. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband.*

*2. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.*

**11.1.** According to the 1973 Revised Alien and Nationality Law, citizenship can be obtained by birth or naturalization. This law addresses the first issue of Article 9 of the Convention as it relates to the nationality of a Liberian woman who is married to a foreign man.

**11.2.** In Liberia, women have equal rights with men to acquire, change, or retain their nationality. Before a woman's nationality is changed it has to be with her consent, whether by marriage or change of her husband's nationality. However, according to the Liberian Constitution, only a Negro or a person of Negro descent can become a citizen in Liberia. It follows, therefore, that a non-black or a white woman, even when married to a Liberian cannot become a citizen of Liberia. This provision of the Constitution does not permit a white woman who is married to a Liberian to change her nationality to a Liberian nationality, even if she would like to acquire that nationality.

**11.3.** The Constitution also disallows non-Negro persons from owning real property in Liberia. Article 22 of the Constitution clearly states that only Liberian citizens shall have the right to own real property and since land is a real property, a non-Negro woman though married to a Liberian cannot own land in Liberia. Article 22 states: *“every person shall have the right to own property alone as well as in association with others; provided that only Liberian citizens shall have right to own real property within the Republic”*.

**11.4.** The second issue in regard to Article 9 of the Convention concerns the issue of women having equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.

**11.5.** Women have equal rights with men when it comes to citizenship of their children. First of all a child born to a Liberian mother and a foreign father is considered a Liberian up to the age of 18 years, when the child may declare her intention to choose the nationality she wants. If a child is born unto a Liberian parent it is presumed that such a child by virtue of the parents' citizenship is a Liberian, unless it can be shown that the child at maturity renounced her Liberian citizenship in preference to any country of choice, preferably the country in which she was born. The same applies to a child born to a parent abroad, whose father is a Liberian. Liberian laws seem to be informed or based on the country's patriarchal culture. The implication is that a child does not take up her mother's citizenship. The child, based on the nationality of her father becomes a citizen of the country to which her father is a citizen.

## **XII. ARTICLE 10: ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:*

*(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;*

*(b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;*

*(c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programs and the adaptation of teaching methods;*

*(d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;*

*(e) The same opportunities for access to programs of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programs, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;*

*(f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programs for girls and women who have left school prematurely;*

*(g) The same Opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;*

*(h) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.*

**12.1.** The Government is committed to the application of the ideals, goals and objectives of the Convention to the formulation and implementation of national education policies. Liberia's education system, however, is seriously undermined by the war and the historical inequality in the educational attainment of boys and girls is a challenge that is yet to be overcome.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS, LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

**12.2.** Article 10 of the Convention is consistent with the intent and purpose of Article 6 of the Liberian Constitution which says in the following unambiguous language:

*“The Republic shall because of the vital role assigned to the individual citizen under the constitution for the social, economic and political wellbeing of Liberia, provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities for all citizens to the extent of available resources. Emphasis shall be placed on the mass education of the Liberian people and the elimination of illiteracy”.*

**12.3.** That is why, to give practical meaning and effect to Article 6 of the Constitution, the new Education Law (2001) states that it is the inalienable right of every citizen, which includes women and men to be entitled to basic education.

**12.4.** The aim of the Education Law is to lay the legal basis, for long term and sustained educational development. The National Girls Education Policy is to ensure, encourage and support the enrolment of and retention of girls in school. Accordingly, a Girls’ Education Unit has been established at the Ministry of Education to implement and coordinate the National Girls Education Policy of Liberia.

#### CURRENT STATUS OF EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

*Table 7: Educational attainment amongst children and adults  
Source: DHS 2007*

Age		No Education	Some Primary	Completed Primary (grade 6)	Some secondary	Completed Secondary or higher
6-9	Girls	86.5	13.1	-	-	-
	Boys	86.5	12.8	-	-	-
10-14	Girls	43.8	50.3	3.3	2.3	-
	Boys	42.2	52.2	2.7	2.6	-
15-49	Women	<b>42.4</b>	27.0	5.2	<b>17.6</b>	<b>7.7</b>
	Men	<b>17.6</b>	26.6	4.9	<b>31.9</b>	<b>18.9</b>

**12.5.** The Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS 2007) results show that the majority of Liberians have little education, with females much less educated than males. 42% of the women and 18% of men have never attended any school, and while 19% of men have complete secondary school or higher, only 8% of women have accomplished the same. For both women and men, urban residents are better educated than rural residents.

**12.6.** Younger women have generally reached higher levels of schooling than older women; however, among men, the median years of education show little change across age ranges. As shown, there is no statistical difference in the educational attainment of young boys and girls (LDHS 2007).

## PROGRAMS AND RESULTS

**12.7.** Education has made strong initial progress, as the Government of Liberia in collaboration with local and international partners, formulated and launched the Education Law (2001), the National Girls Education Policy (2006) and the Free Compulsory Primary Education Policy (2006/2007). It introduced the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), a parallel intervention designed to address the basic education needs of young adults who missed out on education. This program seeks to improve enrolment, attendance, and retention through its school feeding program, with support from the World Food Program. Under this scheme, the Government is providing take home food rations to girls above the age of 15 years in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades. The food ration is intended to supplement their nutritional needs and thereby encourage them to stay in school.

**12.8.** Since the proclamation of the National Girls Education Policy and the Free Compulsory Primary Education Program, there has been a marked improvement in girls' enrollment. Overall, enrolments in public primary schools increased by 82% between 2005/06 and 2007/2008, or from 597,316 to 1,087,257. Enrolment in secondary schools increased by 16 percent over the same period, from 132,224 to 153,467 (PRS 2008: 112). This has contributed to the closing of the gender gap in school enrolment rates; however for some counties and across the country in secondary schools, a gap still exists (see tables below).

## RATIO OF STUDENT ENROLMENT

*Table 8: (Primary School enrolment 2006/2007 by type of school)  
Source: Ministry of Education*

Types	Boys	Girls	Total	% Girls
Public*	254,351	233,827	498,178	48%
Private	79,871	85,770	165,650	52%
Mission	64,159	67,181	131,350	51%
Community*	49,621	49,517	99,138	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>458,012</b>	<b>436,304</b>	<b>894,316</b>	<b>49%</b>

\* Public and Community schools are government-supported schools and account for 67% of total enrollment.

## SECONDARY EDUCATION

**12.9.** Although gender disparities in primary school enrolment have been significantly reduced amongst the fifteen counties in Liberia (refer to Table 8), large disparities continue to exist at the secondary school level (refer to Table 9 and 10). Possible reasons include sexual exploitation and abuse, cultural practice, rape, teenage pregnancies, forced or early marriages as well as discrimination against the girl child and their subsequent drop out from school.



**12.10.** This gender disparity in secondary enrolment varies widely by county. Recognition of these disparities is important and could form the basis for a fresh look at existing policies or perhaps the formulation of a new coherent policy which takes into account the peculiar situation of each county, addresses the imbalances and ultimately raises the level of each county to the level of the rest of the counties. Girls compose 43% of those enrolled in secondary education. If disaggregated it would show two counties, Montserrado (47%) and Nimba (41%) at the top of the rest of the counties. In all other counties, girls are less than 40% of enrolled secondary students with River Gee at 26% and River Cess at 23% at the lowest extreme. These disparities certainly may require special analysis and policy actions to address the peculiar circumstances of the two counties.

**Table 9: Distribution of Enrolment and Gender Disparity in Primary and Secondary Schools by Counties (all schools) 2005/2006**  
Source: Ministry of Education

County	Primary			Secondary		
	Boys	Girls	% Girls	Boys	Girls	% Girls
Bomi	6,402	5,979	<b>48%</b>	618	248	<b>29%</b>
Bong	50,216	44,747	<b>47%</b>	5,314	2,943	<b>36%</b>
Gbarpolu	10,510	8,464	<b>45%</b>	118	48	<b>29%</b>
Grand Bassa	31,352	26,804	<b>46%</b>	2,281	1,382	<b>38%</b>
Grand Cape Mount	14,590	13,063	<b>47%</b>	348	182	<b>34%</b>
Grand Gedeh	13,338	11,890	<b>47%</b>	1,503	765	<b>34%</b>
Grand Kru	28,532	8,583	<b>23%</b>	1,171	317	<b>21%</b>
Lofa	29,290	27,014	<b>48%</b>	2,169	603	<b>22%</b>
Margibi	28,632	28,918	<b>50%</b>	5,842	3,579	<b>38%</b>
Maryland	17,538	15,690	<b>47%</b>	3,074	1,451	<b>32%</b>
Montserrado	117,583	130,952	<b>53%</b>	42,793	38,359	<b>47%</b>
Nimba	82,986	80,610	<b>49%</b>	8,415	5,842	<b>41%</b>
River Cess	14,372	9,969	<b>41%</b>	185	56	<b>23%</b>
River Gee	18,433	14,682	<b>44%</b>	1,021	362	<b>26%</b>
Sinoe	13,958	10,939	<b>44%</b>	889	346	<b>28%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>477,732</b>	<b>438,304</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>75,741</b>	<b>56,483</b>	<b>43%</b>

**Table 10: Secondary school enrolment for 2006/ 2007 by type of school***Source: Ministry of Education*

<b>Types</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Girls</b>
Public*	27,196	13,315	40,511	<b>33%</b>
Private	17,814	4,368	22,182	<b>20%</b>
Mission	16,205	13,505	29,710	<b>45%</b>
Community*	14,526	11,295	25,821	<b>44%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>75,741</b>	<b>42,483</b>	<b>118,224</b>	<b>36%</b>

\* Public and Community schools are government-supported schools and account for 54% of total secondary school enrollment.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

**12.11. Availability of Teachers:** Most of the teachers in the country are not trained although a few are trained graduates from teacher training institutions, colleges and universities. It is therefore presumed, that trained teachers do apply established pedagogical teaching skills and methods in the exercise of their profession. As shown by Table 11, a significant majority of primary and secondary school teachers are male (71% and 74%, respectively).

**Table 11: Number of Primary School Teachers 2006/2007***Source: Ministry of Education*

<b>School Type</b>	<b>Total male</b>	<b>Total Female</b>	<b>Total teachers</b>	<b>% Female</b>	<b>Pupil Teachers Ratio</b>
Public	9,720	3,845	13,566	28%	37:1
Private	4,448	1,826	6,384	29%	26:1
Mission	2,806	1,358	4,164	33%	32:1
Community	1,887	754	2,641	29%	39:1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,861</b>	<b>7,783</b>	<b>26,744</b>	<b>29%</b>	

**Table 12: Number of secondary school teachers 2006/2007***Source: Ministry of Education*

<b>School Type</b>	<b>Total male</b>	<b>Total female</b>	<b>Total teachers</b>	<b>% Female</b>	<b>Pupil Teachers ratio</b>
Public	2,608	867	3,475	25%	13:1
Private	1,749	732	2,486	29%	13:1
Mission	1,262	576	1,840	31%	16:1
Community	826	129	955	14%	27:1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,445</b>	<b>2,311</b>	<b>8,756</b>	<b>26%</b>	

**12.12.** As shown in tables 11 and 12, the Pupil Teachers Ratio (PTR) is much higher in public schools as compared to private and mission schools, while the PTR is similar in public and community schools. It is much higher in community secondary school (27:1) as compared to public secondary schools.

**12.13. *Attitude of Teachers:*** Although there has not been a study regarding the attitude of teachers towards girls, there is no documentation that a teacher has ever opposed the education of girls. However, some male teachers have reportedly made sexual advances and have awarded girls grades based on their desire to engage in sexual relations with them. Private schools are swift in taking actions against teachers who are guilty of sexual harassment of this kind; they are dismissed immediately. However, Government or public schools may not be as swift and decisive on such matters as the private schools.

## **SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS**

**12.14.** One of the core problems which often prevent school age children, girls and boys alike, from either enrolling or remaining in school is poverty. The Government has long since recognized this problem and has accordingly established a scholarship scheme to assist needy students, particularly, the girls. This scholarship scheme has been going very well, benefiting students of all sexes.

**12.15.** In addition to the traditional and previously administered scholarships in existence, Her Excellency, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, has launched another scholarship scheme that has benefited 2,029 students including girls, to study at various secondary and post secondary schools.

**12.16.** The Government also administers a foreign scholarship program which is supported by friendly Governments through grants. Prominent amongst the friendly Governments which continue to provide scholarships and grants are the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Russian Federation and the USA.

**12.17.** Other scholarships are also provided by some international and local NGOs, such as the Liberia Education Trust Fund (LET/Liberia) and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE/LIBERIA), amongst others. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also administers a local scholarship program, called the Ambassador's Girls Scholarship. It is important to note that although these programs are not exclusively provided to girls, special consideration is given to girls due to the large disparity in girls' enrollment and education.

## **ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM**

**12.18.** Literacy among adult women is far lower (41%) than for men (70%). The difference is much larger among the older generations; only 17% of women ages 45-59 are literate, compared to 62% of men. Although the gender difference in literacy rates has declined

among the younger generation, there are still large gaps: only 50% of the women ages 15–19 are literate compared to 72% of men ages 15-19.

**12.19.** The Demographic and Health Survey (2007) records that “there is a strong urban – rural differential in literacy, with far more urban than rural residents being literate. Monrovia, the state capital, has the highest proportion of women and men who are literate; while the Northwestern Region has the lowest. Literacy increases as wealth increases. For example, the proportion of women ages 15-49 who can read increases from 18% among those in the lowest wealth quantity to 73% of those in the highest quantity. This pattern also holds for men” (DHS 2007, 32).

**12.20.** The Ministries of Education and Gender have established an adult literacy program exclusively for women and girls. There are other literacy initiatives that are being administered by local and international NGOs. Using the enrollment rates available, women comprise 70% of those adults enrolled in literacy classes.

*Table 13: Enrollment of Men and Women in Seven (7) Counties (Adult Literacy Classes) 2006/2007\**

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
Bong	1,364	154	1518	90%
Grand Cape Mount	936	147	1,083	86%
Margibi	236	134	370	64%
Montserrado	721	1180	1,901	62%
Grand Gedeh	388	256	644	60%
River Gee	2,687	780	3,864	78%
River Cess	435	209	644	68%
Total	-	-	11,703	70%

\*The data could only be obtained for seven (7) counties of the fifteen (15) counties in Liberia. Data from the other eight (8) counties are not available.

### **ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAM (ALP)**

**12.21.** In addition to the adult literacy program, the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) was established to enable over age males and females to continue their education. Launched in 2006-2007, this program has been instrumental in educating female recruits for the Liberia National Police. The ALP is ongoing; however, statistics are not available to indicate the number of females benefiting from this program.

## **SCHOOL HEALTH DIVISION**

**12.22.** The Government is equally concerned about the health of children in school whose education could be adversely affected if they fall ill. In order to reduce incidences of sickness, a School Health Division has been established at the Ministry of Education. The purpose of the Division is to sensitize and educate youth-in-school about reproductive health, personal hygiene and most importantly HIV/AIDS. Besides prevention, the reproductive component of the program is very important for girls because it enables girls to be mindful and to avoid unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. The activities being undertaken by this Division are not specific to any sex.

## **GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING**

**12.23.** The provision of education or the acquisition of education cannot be for its own sake; it must serve meaningful mutually rewarding purpose for both the provider and recipient, i.e. the state and the student. In order for education to serve useful ends the choice of profession matters. To make a proper professional choice depends on information and guidance. Concerned about the kind of choices and the possible end results, the Ministry of Education has established a Division for Guidance and Counseling which is to develop and provide guidance and counseling programs in the school system in Liberia and consequently help students make appropriate and suitable career choices. It is important however, to mention that none of its programs or activities is specifically directed at any specific sex.

## **PROFESSIONAL ENHANCEMENT OF WOMEN EDUCATORS**

**12.24.** In collaboration with UNICEF and other stakeholders the Ministry of Education developed a professional training for the purpose of providing 12 weeks training in pedagogical knowledge and skills exclusively for women teachers. Some male teachers are also benefiting. Additionally, the National Girls Education Policy contains a provision demanding the institutionalization of periodic in-service training program for female teachers to enhance their professional capacities.

**12.25.** Although efforts have been made to encourage females to enter into the field of science and technology (SMT), no mechanism has been put into place to monitor the enrolment of female students in these areas. Therefore, there is no available data.

## **EVALUATION AND CERTIFICATION**

**12.26.** Liberia is a member of the West African Examination Council headquartered in Nigeria. There is a Liberian Chapter and it is this Chapter which monitors, supervises and administers annual examinations to 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. The successful passing of these exams means a promotion, in the case of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders, to the next grades while for the 12<sup>th</sup> graders it is graduation from secondary school and hopefully to college or university

depending on classification. The following table shows yet another disparity between girls and boys who register for the exams.

**Table 14: Registration for Exams (2007)**

*Source: Ministry of Education, Statistics on performance on the May/June 2007 Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination*

No. of Schools	Registered			Those Who Sat Exams		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Female	Total
272	11,431	6,757	18,431	11,392	6,597	17,989
Percentage	63.3%	36.6%		63.3%	36.7%	

**Table 15: Nationwide Statistics, Number of Candidates**

*Source: Ministry of Education, Statistics on performance on the May/June 2007 Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination*

No. of Schools	Failed			Passed			Absent		
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
272	6,455	3,929	2,526	11,534	7,463	4,071	442	282	160
Percentage	35%	61%	39%	63%	65%	35%	2%	64%	36%

## TERTIARY EDUCATION

**12.27.** There is no statistical information to show the enrolment of girls and women at the Tertiary level

## DROPOUTS

**12.28.** The Girls Education Unit/MOE launched the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) in January 2008 with support from UNICEF to monitor and ensure that all girls' education programs are implemented properly. This network plans to conduct a survey on the number of female dropouts at all levels in education within the country as part of its work plan. At present, there is no available data of female dropouts.

## CHALLENGES/CONSTRAINTS

### **XIII. ARTICLE 11: EQUAL RIGHTS TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

*1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:*

- (a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;*
- (b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;*
- (c) The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;*
- (d) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;*
- (e) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave;*
- (f) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.*
- 2. In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:*
- (a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;*
- (b) To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;*
- (c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities;*
- (d) To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.*
- 3. Protective legislation relating to matters covered in this article shall be reviewed periodically in the light of scientific and technological knowledge and shall be revised, repealed or extended as necessary*

## CONSTITUTIONAL/LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**13.1.** Articles 8 and 18 of the Constitution of Liberia state as follows:

***“Article 8: Principles on Discrimination in Employment Opportunities  
The Republic shall direct its policy towards ensuring for all citizens without discrimination, opportunity for employment and livelihood just and humane conditions, and towards promoting safety, health and welfare facilities.***

***Article 18: “All Liberian citizens shall have equal opportunity for work and employment regardless of sex, and religion, ethnic background, place of origin or political affiliation, and shall be entitled to equal pay for equal work”***

**13.2.** Both the Government and people of Liberia are bound by the Constitution and the Convention to adopt and practice non-discriminatory employment laws and policies. The Government has not promulgated any law, either as a statute, regulation or proclamation for the purpose of creating a dual employment practice (one system for men and one for women) in Liberia.

**13.3.** The current minimum wage for unskilled labor by law is 25 US cents per hour, while a minimum skilled labor wage is yet to be determined. It is left to the will of employers. While Government pays its employees monthly salaries, privately-owned firms are exempt from regulations of wages. The situation is, however, changing gradually as the Government has instituted raises in both salaries and benefits for civil servants. If the trend continues, public servants will benefit from higher salaries and benefits as compared to the private sector and could make the public sector a heavily contested ground for employment. Should it continue, it appears that the private sector will be forced to respond in ways that would encourage the retention of employees.

**13.4.** Most importantly, laws and regulations on wages, salaries or benefits are not discriminatory as to sex or other categories and therefore wage or salary raises are expected to apply to all employees, except for valid reasons. In a situation where an employee is denied increment in wages or salaries or benefits without legitimate reasons the employee is at liberty to proceed to the labor court established at the Ministry of Labor for remedial actions. Actions in the labor court by an aggrieved litigant are not restricted by nationality or sex.

**13.5.** The Labor Inspectorate deals with problems in the work place. Inspectors will intervene to settle problems between employers and employees. If the employee is not satisfied with the Inspector’s intervention, the employee will be advised to submit a complaint in writing to the Minister of Labor. Upon receipt of a complaint, the Minister forwards it to the Division of Labor Standards where a hearing officer will handle the case. At present, no data is available about the number, or types, of cases handled by the Labor Inspectorate. There is also no data available about cases handled by the Labor Court.



## REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO MATERNITY AND OTHER BENEFITS

**13.6.** The Ministry of Labor Regulation #3 sets out the various categories of leaves that an employee may benefit from. In regard to maternity, the regulations cover maternity leave, pay and dismissal for reasons of maternity. They state in pertinent parts:

*“A female expecting the birth of a child shall be given a maternity leave by her employer for a given period of three months, which shall commence before between and expires after her conferment (sect. 1)”*

*“A female employee is entitled to receive from her employer full wages during a maternity leave” (sect. 2)*

*“An employer shall not dismiss a female who is pregnant to avoid maternity leave. If it is proven that a female employee has been dismissed for such reasons she shall be entitled to pay compensation for wrongful dismissal which shall not be less than three months wages” (section 3)*

**13.7.** It appears that these regulations are implemented in practice, but no monitoring system is currently in place. At present, there are no child care facilities available in places of employment.

**13.8.** The retirement age for women and men is 65 years, and women and men are equally entitled to retirement benefits in the formal sector.

## STATE OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR

**13.9** In general, women play a major role in Liberia’s economy, its labor force, and household income generation. Yet women and men are not equally distributed across the productive sectors, nor are they equally remunerated. In an economy dominated by agricultural and informal work, women carry the heaviest burden in these sectors and women laborers, across the board, are less likely to be paid for their work.

**13.10.** Including formal and informal workers in Liberia, women make up 54% of the labor force (CWIQ 2007).

**13.11.** Liberian women are disproportionately clustered in the least productive sectors with 90% employed in the informal sector or in agriculture, compared to 75% of working men. Men are more than three times as likely to be employed by the civil service, an NGO, international organization or public corporation (CWIQ 2007).

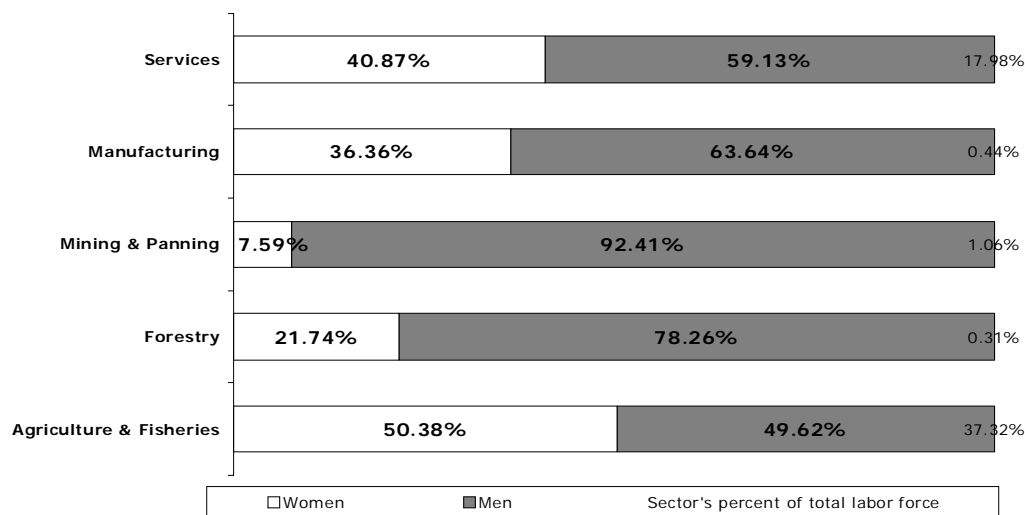
**13.12.** Given women’s predominance in agriculture and the informal economy, men greatly outnumber women in all other sectors of Liberia’s economy. The manufacturing sector hires

men at a rate of 2 men for every 1 woman. In mining and panning, more than 9 men are hired to every 1 woman. In forestry it is nearly 4:1 and in the services sector 3:2. Only in agriculture and fisheries are men and women employed at an equal 1:1 ratio.

**Figure 1:**

**Gender breakdown of labor by sector**

Source: CWIQ 2007



*Note: sector's percent of total labor force does not add up to 100% because the category of "other" is not represented in this graph.*

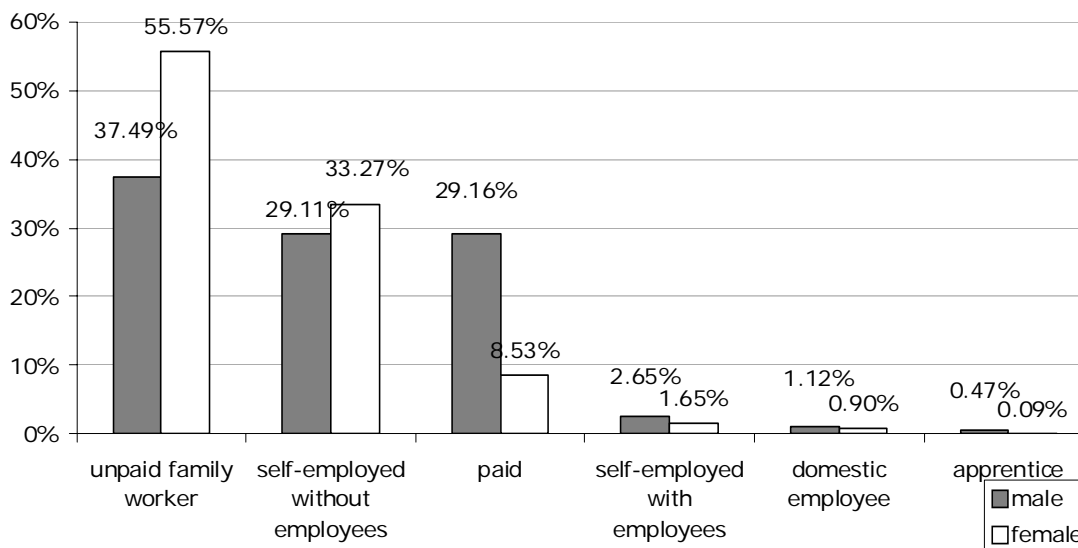
**13.13.** A further breakdown of the sectors shows greater distinctions between women's and men's employment. While women make up over two-thirds of workers in wholesale or retail trade, they are less than one-third of service workers in electricity/gas/water, construction, transport/storage, communication/financial services and community services. Within agriculture, women are just over half of the crop farmers and less than one-third of the workers in livestock, poultry, and fishing.

**13.14.** Across Liberia's economy, working men that are paid on wages outnumber women by over three to one (25.5% of all male workers versus 8.0% of all female workers). Just under half of all Liberia's workers are engaged in unpaid family work, presumably supporting household agriculture and informal economic activities. 56% of female laborers and 38% of male laborers are engaged as unpaid family workers.

**Figure 2:****Employment Status by Gender**

*Represents proportion of all (fe)male workers under each category of employment*

Source: CWIQ 2007

**EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES**

**13.15.** A national strategy for employment creation in Liberia launched by Her Excellency the President on 15 July, 2006 provides for immediate emergency employment and lays the foundation for a longer-term sustainable employment strategy. It reflects a phased approach where the immediate concern is rapid job creation for sustainable development. The program presently being implemented under the Liberia Emergency Employment Program (LEEP), a national public works program, and the Liberia Employment Action Program (LEAP), aims to stimulate employment creation in the country. At present, a little over 83,000 jobs have been created under the LEEP/LEAP between 2006-December 2007 and about 900 women benefited.

**13.16.** The Ministry of Gender and Development collaborating with the Ministry of Labor, in partnership with the United Nations Development fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) initiated the process of mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment into Liberia's poverty reduction strategy, finalized in 2008, employment policies, and programs. The ultimate outcome of this partnership will be the creation of equitable, productive, rewarding and sustainable employment opportunities for all, especially women.

**13.17.** Within the PRS, some concrete examples of the efforts to ensure women's enhanced role in the economy include: "provide inputs such as seeds, tools, fertilizers, agro-chemicals and agricultural processing equipment to vulnerable groups such as women and smallholders," "encourage, promote and strengthen farmer-based organizations as the primary institution for farmer coordination, with particular emphasis on women and youth," "establish agricultural and MSME programs such as management training and skills development to create employment opportunities for youth, women and the vulnerable," and "provide skills training for MSMEs to promote the transition from the informal to the formal economy."

#### **XIV. ARTICLE 12: EQUAL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**

***1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.***

***2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.***

**14.1.** Liberia's health services have been severely disrupted by over 14 years of civil conflict. Health workers fled to camps for internally displaced people, to secured areas or to neighboring countries. Health facilities were looted and vandalized and medical supplies became unavailable. Government funding stopped and health services collapsed (UNDP, 1996). Following the end of the war, the revitalization of the health services has begun, but the situation is still bad.

**14.2.** Health care delivery is fragmented and uneven, and heavily dependent on donor-funded vertical programs. International NGOs providing health services are still operating in a humanitarian mode. Currently, the available health care is at large provided by NGOs who operate over 80 percent of existing health facilities nationwide.

#### **CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES, NATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR HEALTH**

**14.3.** Access to health care is a basic human right enshrined in the Constitution. Health is a precondition for individual and societal development. Recognizing the value of health, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOH&SW) has devoted itself to ensuring that every Liberian will have access to health and social welfare services regardless of economic status, origin, religion, gender or geographic location. Towards this end, the MOH&SW has developed a National Health Policy and Strategic Plan, and initiated a National Two-Year

Transition Plan in 2006 as a short-term emergency intervention to prevent the potential crisis that was developing as a result of the departure of humanitarian NGOs.

**14.4.** The goal of the Health Policy of Liberia is to improve the health status of an increasing number of citizens, on an equal basis, through expanded access to effective basic health care, backed by adequate referral services and resources.

**14.5.** Liberia operates a 3-tier system mode of health delivery services. This national health system is based on three levels of care (primary, secondary and tertiary), with each acting as gate-keeper for the next level. Users directly access quality primary health care services. Access to higher levels of care is based upon referrals, except in cases of emergency.

**14.6.** The MOH&SW is committed to ensuring equity and quality through the delivery of a Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), including essential preventive and curative care services to be provided at each level of the health system – from the community to referral hospitals. The Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) is the cornerstone of the national health care delivery strategy. It defines the services that the MOH&SW assures will be available to each and every Liberian. The BPHS focuses on six priorities: maternal and newborn care, child health, reproductive and adolescent health, communicable disease control (including HIV and AIDS), mental health, and emergency care. Under the PRS (2008-2011) the Government will strategically implement the BPHS incrementally within each county to provide effective and affordable health services to meet its goal that 70% of existing health facilities be providing the BPHS by the end of 2010. The Government will further maintain the suspension of fees until the socio-economic situation improves.

## **SOME GENERAL HEALTH INDICATORS**

**14.7.** Life expectancy at birth is 45 years (CFSNS, 2006). Several key health indicators have begun to improve since the end of the conflict though are still poor. For example, infant mortality rates fell from 117 in 2000 to 72 per 1000 live births in 2007 and the under 5 mortality fell from 194 in 2000 to 111 per 1000 live births in 2007 (PRS 2008: 30). The crude mortality rate was recently estimated in rural areas at the alarming level of 1.1 deaths per 10,000 persons per day (CFSNS, 2006).

## **ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**

**14.8.** In 2006 only 10 % of communities reported having a health facility within their community. The major concern for the population is the lack of financial and physical access to health care as well as the quality of health care delivery. (PRS 2008: 30)

## **MATERNAL HEALTH**

**14.9.** Maternal mortality appears to have increased from 578 in 2000 to 994 in 2007 per 100,000 live births (PRS 2008: 30). The maternal deaths are attributed to direct obstetric

causes, namely: obstructed labor, infections, hemorrhage, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (eclampsia) and the complications of unsafe abortion. Other factors which also contribute to maternal and newborn mortality are: delays in recognizing problems, deciding to seek care, reaching care and receiving care, lack of adequate transport system, inadequate emergency obstetric care, inadequate medical personnel, and supply of drugs, and equipment, poor nutritional status of pregnant women, high fertility rates and high number of teen pregnancies (PRS 2008: 30). Some women who survive these complications develop life-long disabilities such as vesico/recto vaginal fistulae and secondary infertility.

**14.10.** Access to skilled maternal care is very low. About seventy-five percent of births occur outside the health facilities and unskilled birth attendants perform about 85 percent of all deliveries.

### **ANTE-NATAL PERIOD**

**14.11.** Antenatal care appears to be valued by women in Liberia. Although the institutional delivery rate is still very low, especially in rural areas, there appears to be a high attendance rate of women at antenatal clinics, at least from communities that have easy access to health facilities. According to the 1999/2000 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS), 84.4% of pregnant women in Liberia received antenatal care from either a nurse/midwife or a doctor, while only 36.2% of pregnant women delivered at a health facility and only 15% of deliveries occur in health facilities staffed by qualified practitioners. All pregnant mothers have a home-based mother's record card on which all relevant information is recorded.

### **POST-NATAL PERIOD**

**14.12.** The post-natal period is of particular significance in enabling Liberia to move towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). For the most part, care given during the post-natal period is mainly focused on the newborn and not on the mother; although more than 75% of mothers who deliver in health facilities return at least a month following the delivery. The situation is even more hazardous in communities where there are no skilled birth attendants to address complications that may arise. Additionally, there are no facilities available to handle mental conditions, such as depression, related to the postpartum period.

**14.13.** The Safe Mother Management Protocols define the minimum level of services to be offered during the postpartum period. But, these protocols remain to be implemented. Current interventions are seriously limited, particularly during the first 24 hrs. Immediately, after the delivery, the emphasis is placed on hygiene of the mother and ensuring the disposal of the placenta. Micronutrient supplemental has been initiated; though this is still on a very low scale.

## ADOLESCENT HEALTH

**14.14.** The incidence of teenage pregnancy in the country is a major cause of concern. According to the 2007 LDHS, 48% of Liberian women become pregnant by the age of 18. Many of the teenage mothers are between 12 – 14 years and are at risk for complications associated with pregnancy. Cultural practices encourage early marriage of girls. As a result of the conflict between societal values and people's behaviors, and the disapproving attitudes of parents and service providers, adolescents are frequently barred from reproductive health services and may end up in worse situations. The health needs of adolescent are not met.

**14.15.** Sex education is very important, but in Liberia, sex education is limited. As a result many of the pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adolescents arise because of ignorance as well as lack of access to services.

## ABORTION

**14.16.** Abortion may be legally performed to save the life of the woman, as well as in cases where the continuation of the pregnancy poses risks to the physical and mental health of the woman or for therapeutic reasons. However the increasing numbers of illegal and unsafe abortions add another horrific dimension to this complex situation. Unmarried adolescents are more likely to engage in unprotected sex, which can result in pregnancy. Many adolescent pregnancies are unwanted and these contribute to the growing number of induced unsafe abortions.

## FAMILY PLANNING

**14.17.** Family planning, identified as an essential component of primary and reproductive health care plays a major role in reducing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality in Liberia. Family planning services are not well accepted in a pill dominant, Depo-Provera and condom exclusive service, with a national contraceptive prevalence rate of 12.95 (LDHS 2007). According to the 2007 LDHS the unmet need for family planning is over 60%.

**14.18.** Currently, service providers are not trained to administer a range of family planning services. Consequently, they offer the services that clients request and services that they can administer rather than services based on their assessment. Clients request the methods they know about and like. Given the opportunity to choose what is best suited and available, their choices may be different and diversified. Service providers' skills need to be updated to enable them provide a full range of services.

## STI/HIV/AIDS PREVALENCE AMONG WOMEN

**14.19.** According to the 2006 HIV antenatal sentinel survey, the HIV prevalence is 5.7%. The survey was conducted for a period of six to twelve weeks (from July to October 2006) in ten sentinel sites located in nine counties, representing the five regions in Liberia. Every

pregnant woman aged 15 to 49 years attending antenatal care for the first time during the current pregnancy was included in the survey. A total of 4,216 samples were collected from the ten sites and of these 54.5% were women age 15-24. 70.2% of the women had elementary level or no education, 68.5% were married and 50.7% had at most one live birth. Existing data are inadequate to draw firm conclusions about internal variations in HIV prevalence. It appears that Monrovia and the Southeastern Region have higher HIV prevalence rates than the rest of the country. (PRS P. 31)

**14.20.** There are 75 hospitals and health centers that are providing HIV Testing and Counseling services and 18 PMTCT (prevention of mother to child transmission) sites and 15 ART sites that provide ARVs drugs to treat HIV/AIDS. HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are on the rise and estimated at above 10% of the population and affecting women more than men, particularly affecting girls at younger ages. From 2000 to 2001, there was a 100% increase in the reported cases of STIs: from 75,390 to 150,780 (NACP/MOH&SW).

**14.21.** Health workers are trained in syndromic management of STIs within the fifteen counties. Moreover, family planning and antenatal consultations are used as opportunities to promote behavior change in preventing HIV/STIs.

#### **ADEQUATE NUTRITION DURING PREGNANCY AND LACTATION**

**14.22.** Food insecurity in Liberia is high and is evident in the poor nutritional status of the population. 11 % of the households in rural and semi rural areas are food insecure while 40% of the population has been found to be either highly or moderately vulnerable to food insecurity. Female headed households are also more food insecure and spend a greater proportion of their income on food than male headed households (CFSNS 2006: 29). Approximately 27% of children under-five years are underweight. In addition, an estimated 7% are wasted, while 39% are stunted (CFSNS, 2006). These values are remarkably similar to those registered by the National Nutrition Survey of 2000. In the same year, iron deficiency anemia was 87% in children 6 – 35 months, 58% in non-pregnant women 14 – 49 years, and 62% in pregnant women aged 14 – 49 years.<sup>1</sup> Vitamin A deficiency affects 52.9% of children 6 – 35 months and 12% of pregnant women. Only 35% of children below 6 months of age are exclusively breast-fed (UNICEF, 2006). Zinc supplementation for children has not yet been introduced.

**14.23.** In pregnancy, falciparum malaria is an important cause of severe illness and the death of both mother and fetus. Malaria parasitisation of the placenta, especially in first and second pregnancies, is also an important contributor (8% - 14%) to low birth weight and between 3% -8% of infant mortality as a result. Suppression of infection through Intermittent Preventive Treatment with Sulphadoxine and Pyramethamine early in the second and third trimester has proven to reduce these risks considerably, and is therefore given routinely to all pregnant women.



**14.24.** The best strategy is to prevent transmission of malaria. This is achieved through use of insecticide treated bed nets (ITNs) by under-five children and pregnant women. Trials of their use by young children have demonstrated a 20% reduction in all cases of childhood deaths and about a 50% decline in clinical episodes. Their use by pregnant women has led to a 47% reduction in anemia caused by malaria and a 28% reduction in low birth weight. With these results as incentives, the Ministry of Health is providing free long-lasting ITNs to as many pregnant women and under-five children as possible. They are distributed through antenatal clinics and both routine and special immunization clinics and outreach. Systematic house-to-house distribution by community malaria workers seeks to reach families that have not received ITNs through clinics.

## **HEALTH AWARENESS**

**14.25.** Communities Health Workers (CHWs) including traditional birth attendants provide health talks at the community level whereas in the clinics health talks are provided by trained health workers. Information Education Communication/Behavior or Change Communication (IEC/BCC) strategies for prevention and control of diseases have been developed and put in place at all levels. Home-based life saving skills which are a set of behavior – change interventions that promote increased knowledge and the acquisition of skills to keep a pregnant woman healthy; to recognize life-threatening maternal and newborn problems and/or complications, and to foster the adoption of health care and health-seeking behavior at the individual and community levels to prevent maternal and neonatal deaths are major components of the strategy.

## **LACK OF TRAINED WOMEN HEALTH PERSONNEL**

**14.26.** According to the Rapid Assessment of the Health Situation in Liberia 2006, the workforce is composed of approximately 4,000 full-time and 1,000 part-time staff. Of these, the current number of trained women health personnel is about 60% - 70%. The distribution of trained health workers is grossly imbalanced in favor of urban areas. Most trained health workers are in the urban areas. With few mid-level health workers in the rural areas, responses to obstetric emergencies are hindered by lack of skilled personnel, drugs, inadequate referral facilities or transportation for referrals.

**14.27.** However, the issue of human resources for health is being addressed in the following ways. The MOH&SW is in the process of:

- developing training packages for health workers to upgrade their skills
- establishing in-service training unit
- implementing a recruitment strategy from each of the fifteen counties
- re-establishing training institutions for mid level health workers especially midwives in the rural parts of Liberia (Zorzor in the North, Zwedru in the South East).

**14.28.** Health services are provided free of charge at all public health facilities however, availability of essential drugs and medical supplies are limited.

**14.29.** Bad road conditions, especially during the rainy seasons hinder the transport and distribution of essential drugs. The Ministry of Health has plans to put in place five regional drug depots to compliment the services of the National Drug Service (NDS).

### **INADEQUATE FACILITIES**

**14.30.** Health care facilities in Liberia are inadequate, especially in the rural areas where there have been severe disruptions in the delivery of health care for a prolonged period due to the civil crisis. In 1990, there were 30 hospitals, 50 health centers and 330 clinics functional. The 2006 MOH rapid assessment identified 354 functional facilities including 18 hospitals, 50 health centers and 206 clinics. An additional 200 health facilities were non-functional. Out of the 30 hospitals, only 13 were functional government hospitals. Two hospitals have since been renovated and are functioning.

**14.31.** The hospital component of the health sector is under-sized. Its technical capacity is grossly inadequate. Large investments are already underway to restore and construct the functionality of hospitals, health centers, and clinics especially in underserved areas.

### **HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AND THEIR HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

**14.32.** The Women, Health and Development Division at the MOH&SW (WHD) trained community leaders, women groups, in seven counties, in collaboration with the National Association on Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women and Children (NATPAH) INC. They were trained to work in communities, to address harmful traditional practices that affect the health of women and children.

**14.33.** Some of the traditional practices affecting the health of women/children are:

- a) Son preference - The practice of son preference involves the preferential treatment by parents of male children. This often manifests itself in the neglect, deprivation or discriminatory treatment of girls to the detriment of their physical and mental health. Son preference manifests itself in a number of ways, all of which have negative repercussions for girls and women such as: family nutrition, where girls will be breastfed for a shorter period than boys, in families where food is scarce, the most nutritional food is reserved for boys and men, who may be fed first, with the leftover feeding women and girls resulting in higher incidences and degrees of malnourishment and mortality among female children.
- b) Nutritional taboos – This traditional practice prevents pregnant women and children from eating nutritional food such as pineapple, meat, eggs, snail etc. which leads to malnourishment.

- c) Early marriages – Parents giving their daughters in marriage at an early age, that is below 18 years, leading to girls being withdrawn from school, early pregnancy and difficult delivery resulting in formation of fistula. This causes early maternal mortality, lessens the life expectancy of girls and adversely affects their health
- d) Tattoos, Ear piercing and Blacking of the gum - beautification of the body with sharp instrument such as glass bottle, knives, razor blades, and can lead to transmission of HIV/AIDS and infections.
- e) Trial by ordeal – using of sharp and hot instrument to prove someone accused of doing wrong as innocent. This practice most often affects ignorant women and girls in the rural areas.

**14.34.** Women and girls are the main victims of harmful traditional practices, often to the point of permanent physical, psychological and emotional damages, even death.

**14.35.** The harmful effects of these traditional practices on the health of women and children have been surveyed by the Women, Health and Development Division of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare(WHD/MOH) in collaboration with the National Association on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and children(NATPAH) INC., in 6 communities in Montserrado County. The survey result shows that 96.0 percent of the 300 women and girls interviewed have undergone harmful traditional practices.

**14.36.** In an effort to widen opportunities for women and men to combat harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women and children, trained community workers provide health talks to women and community members on harmful traditional practices that affect the health of women and children and how to prevent these practices. Issues of human rights are also discussed.

### **FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)**

**14.37.** FGM is rooted or embedded in the traditional society (Poro or Sande) of Liberia. The 2007 Demographic and Health Survey provided the first national estimations of prevalence of the Sande Society in Liberia. 58.2% of Liberian women aged 15-49 (39.5% of urban women and 72.0% of rural women) are members of the Sande Society (have undergone FGC). Of these women who have been cut, 45.2% think that the tradition should stop. Knowledge about the practice is widespread in Liberian society with 89% of Liberian women having heard of the Sande Society.

**14.38.** Studies have shown that those involved in the practice of FGM do so as a means of economic gains. In order to eliminate the practice of FGM, WHD, in collaboration with NATPAH have trained more than 750 practitioners in 7 counties in various income generating activities such as soap making, tie-dying, fish preservation, weaving, sewing, and agriculture as an alternative to FGM. Because of the use of this alternative, 350 have laid down their tools (knives) and publicly denounced the practice of FGM.

**14.39.** Most victims and community members are afraid to speak out for fear of punishment; members are often threatened to be ostracized or killed by practitioners (Zoes). Therefore, the WHD/MOH&SW in collaboration with NATPAH used the one-to-one strategy (victims reaching out to victims and others at risk) in the communities to address this problem. Various women groups go into the communities to educate practitioners on the physical and psychosocial effects of FGM on women and girls. WHD, MOHSW have trained women and girls as Action Awareness Groups (AAG) to create awareness in communities on harmful effects of FGM. WHD, in collaboration with NATPAH has developed 2 sets of books, “Women to Women” and a “Discussion Guide” to be used by the Action Awareness Groups and the Functional Adult Literacy Program to raise awareness and mobilize the community against harmful traditional practices including female genital mutilation. A Resource Center has been established within the WHD for report writing and information gathering.

**14.40.** Despite these strategies and numerous activities in Liberia, there is no government legislation prohibiting FGM in Liberia.

### **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)**

**14.41.** An analysis of gender based violence in Liberia is included under Article 5 of this report. As a response from the health sector to this issue, a total of seventy-three health care providers have been trained as Trainer of Trainers (TOT) comprising Professional Nurses (RN), certified Midwives (CM), Physician Assistants (PA), and Medical Doctors to provide clinical management of GBV survivors in communities in six counties (Bong, Nimba, Bomi, Grand Bassa, Montserrado, and Grand Gedeh).

### **XV. ARTICLE 13: FAMILY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:*

*(a) The right to family benefits;*

*(b) The right to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit;*

*(c) The right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.*

**15.1.** There are several schemes intended to benefit employees either at death or at a time when an employee is incapacitated either as a result of old age, illness or is disabled. All employees benefit from these schemes irrespective of sex, creed, religion or political affiliation. Women employees are entitled to equal family benefit as men in the formal employment sectors in Liberia. Such benefits may include housing, medical and health insurance benefits.

**15.2.** The Government operates three benefit/pension schemes: two are administered by the National Civil Service Agency, while the other is managed by the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP), a parastatal entity. The National Civil Service Agency scheme is actually a pension plan exclusively administered for the benefit of all civil servants men and women alike without prejudice to any sex. The eligibility criteria are upon the attainment of 65 years or tenure of 25 years of service. It is also paid when one is sick and becomes incapacitated to work or where one decides to request for early retirement. The amount paid is determined by one's salary and length of service at retirement. The latter is administered by the National Social Security Corporation and is intended for all employees, public and private, only on whose behalf employers pay monthly premiums, again without discrimination to women employees. The NASSCORP scheme is quite comprehensive as it covers injury on the job, disabilities and a monthly payment of pension benefit until death. The NASSCORP also pays death benefits to all beneficiaries irrespective of their sex.

**15.3.** The Government of Liberia also operates a severance benefit program, again managed by the Civil Service Agency.

**15.4.** Some private companies may also provide certain benefits, for example housing, free education, and health benefits, but no further details are currently available.

**15.5.** Beyond these, there are currently no benefit schemes available, and there are no benefits or social insurance schemes for persons in the informal sector.

## **LOANS AND GENERAL ACCESS TO CAPITAL/LOANS**

**15.6.** Generally, there are no barriers to women acquiring or accessing loans, or owning and managing a business. There are, however, criteria for the acquisition of loans. The normal criteria often set by banks and businesses are either (a) capacity to pay (b) capacity to put up collateral and (c) related to these, the creditor's track record.

**15.7.** Access to loans is generally difficult. It is especially difficult for women, given high poverty and illiteracy rates. Rural women in particular may be unaware about the existence of loan opportunities, the process of benefiting from such loans, and are hardly in a position to satisfy the requirements for obtaining a loan.

**15.8.** Informal loan schemes, however, do exist which provide loans only to members. These loan associations are sometimes called annual savings clubs, and women as well as men may be members. Rural women are most disadvantaged since hardly any loan associations are organized in the rural areas. Rural women also lack collateral, and therefore, do not have access to bank loans. Bank loans are, in practice, restricted to urban and relatively propertied women.

**15.9.** UNDP, in collaboration with the Central Bank of Liberia, has initiated a micro credit scheme through which over 1,000 women have benefited. Other local and international

NGOs are providing micro-credit to women, but there is no data available at this time on the number of beneficiaries. The 2008 PRS includes the strategic objective of broadening and extending financial services to micro, small and medium enterprises through microfinance. This will include the development of a new national microfinance policy. The Ministry of Gender and Development, and women's organizations such as UNIFEM will be consulted in this process (PRS: 81).

#### **XVI. ARTICLE 14: RURAL WOMEN**

*1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.*

*2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:*

*(a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;*

*(b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counseling and services in family planning;*

*(c) To benefit directly from social security programs;*

*(d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;*

*(e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;*

*(f) To participate in all community activities;*

*(g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;*

*(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.*

## **THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE ECONOMY**

**16.1.** Agriculture provided the mainstay of the economy throughout the Liberian conflict. A large proportion of the economically active population of Liberia is engaged either directly or indirectly in smallholder subsistence agriculture or fisheries. Women and children are particularly dependent on the agricultural sector.

**16.2.** Women are major players in the agricultural sector, where they constitute the majority of smallholder producers and the agriculture labor force in general. Women produce some 60% of agriculture products, carry out 80% of trading activities in rural areas, and play a vital role in linking rural and urban markets to their formal networks. Despite their deep involvement in agriculture, they represent a tiny fraction of participants in the formal sector. They also have less access to productive inputs than men, including land, skills training, basic tools and technology (PRS 2008, 61).

**16.3.** Revitalizing the agricultural sector is crucial to overall economic recovery and to ensuring that growth is inclusive and that it promotes peace and sustains poverty reduction.

## **THE ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN IN THE ECONOMIC SURVIVAL OF THEIR FAMILIES**

**16.4.** Women are the primary marketers and traders of agricultural goods and contribute to more than 75% of all cash and food crop production. In agriculture-producing households, women are involved in 76% of cash crop production and 93% of food crop production. In addition, women conduct 85% of all marketing and trading, a vital complement to crop production for income generation.

**16.5.** Within production, the roles of men and women are somewhat separated: 22% of cash crops are produced solely by men, compared to only 6% of food crops produced solely by men. According to CFSNS 2007: “[Rural] men were much more likely than women to engage in rubber tapping, pit-sawing, mining, salaried work, skilled labor, handicraft work, contract or casual work, and raising livestock for others. Women more commonly engaged in petty trade/ small scale business, begging, and sales of prepared food.” (19)

**16.6.** In spite of the long-standing traditional and customary laws discriminating against rural women, they have contributed immensely to the economic survival of the family. The report of the Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) conducted in 2006 shows that the 41% of households surveyed are engaged in “food crop production” and 31% in “processing and sale of palm nut/oil” thus contributing the highest in terms of income generation for livelihood. The CFSNS further estimated that 33% of household’s income was jointly generated by men and women, 33% by men only and 16% by women. It further revealed that women contributed 52% of the total agricultural production in Liberia.

**16.7.** Non-monetized sectors of the economy are economic activities undertaken by women such as child bearing and rearing or caring, and the management of the home. It also includes the fetching of water, hewing of wood, preparation of meals and other domestic chores.

### **PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

**16.8.** There is no statistical evidence to show the participation of rural women in development planning.

**16.9.** Even though women and men share many of the burdens of poverty, their experience of the burdens of poverty and the effects of development interventions are profoundly different. Despite this, women's participation in development planning is still limited, given their limited participation in community meetings at the local levels. Male chiefs and elders have traditionally dominated these community structures, and customs exclude women from community decision-making processes.

### **INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

**16.10.** On the average about 71% of male heads of households attend town and community meetings as compared to 49% female heads of households (LDHS –1999/2000). Although Liberian women carry significant workloads in the village and the home, their labor is often not recognized. They are not allowed to appear before the law in the absence of their husbands in many traditional settings. Women are not encouraged or perhaps not allowed to attend town, community, or civil and administrative meetings. According to the Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) 1999/2000, on average 71% of male heads of household attend town, community, or civil and administrative meetings while only 49% of female heads attend.

### **REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

**16.11.** In Liberia, the Family Planning Association of Liberia and the hospitals or clinics are the leading sources of information on contraceptives. Very few women who have ever heard of the various methods of contraception have ever used them. Only 28.3% nationally of women who have heard of pills and 22.4% of women nationally who have heard of condoms has ever used them. In the rural areas, only 16.5 and 13.8%, respectively of women who have ever heard of condom and pill have ever used them. For the urban areas, the percentages are 42.1% and 31.2%, respectively.

**16.12.** The contraceptive that women are most aware of is the pill, (59.3%) of women, followed by the condom (49%) and injectable contraceptives (40.4%). Among men, the most widely used known contraceptive is the condom, known by (4.3%), followed by the pill (7.0%) and the injectable (27.6%). The proportion of men and women who have heard of condom is higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas. In the urban areas, 65.4% of



women and 76% of men have heard of condom, as compared to 39.6% of women and 57.8 % of men in the rural areas.

## **MATERNAL HEALTH**

**16.13.** The only maternal health information available at the time of this report is the national average and information provided in the health section of the report.

## **OWNERSHIP OF LAND AND PROPERTIES:**

**16.14.** According to LDHS 1999/2000, 37% of household heads throughout Liberia own property such as land. This proportion is the same for both urban and rural areas and is slightly higher among male than female heads of household, 38% and 35%, respectively. The Survey further states that there is a slight bias in favor of males when it comes to the registration of property. Property is most likely registered in the name of male (15%) or jointly in the names of heads of households and their spouses (16%) when the household head is a female.

**16.15.** Ownership of property is gradually being addressed. A new Inheritance Law has been enacted by the Liberian Legislature. However, many rural women are not fully aware of the law and traditional custom is restricting them from exercising their rights of independently owning properties. In the urban settings the situation is different as women can own property independent of their husbands.

## **DIRECT BENEFIT FROM SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAMS**

**16.16.** The National Social Security Corporation (NASSCORP) was established by Government to develop and administer social welfare programs for both Liberians and aliens. The activities are however, limited to only wage or salary earners on whose behalf premiums are deducted and for whom employers remit contributions in addition to the deductions from their salary to NASSCORP. It would seem, therefore, that non-wage earners do not and may never benefit in the foreseeable future. This means that rural dwellers, particularly rural women not already informed about NASSCORP'S programs, and compounded by their non-wage/salary status are excluded. However, women who are employed and meet up with the requirement of the Corporation benefit without discrimination.

## **EDUCATION**

**16.17.** Literacy rates for women in rural areas is staggeringly low at 26%, compared to 61% for urban women and 60% and 86% for rural and urban men, respectively. The gender gap in secondary school attendance is particularly high in the rural areas with a low 6% net attendance ratio for females and 13% for males. In urban areas this gap is much smaller (29% and 32%, respectively) (LDHS 2007).

**16.18** The state recognizes the need to close this gap and to promote a drastic and rapid increase in school attendance in rural areas. The education policies, particularly the girl education policy, outlined under Article 10 are written to address these concerns.

### **EXTENSION SERVICES**

**16.19.** While the agricultural department provides technical know how, seeds and equipment to farmers, there is no data on how women farmers benefit from these services.

### **ACCESS TO AGRICULTURE CREDIT/LOAN**

**16.20.** Access to agriculture credits (formal financial services) is not available to Liberian farmers, especially smallholders. According to the Comprehensive Assessment of the Agriculture Sector of Liberia (CAAS-LIB), financial institutions are now beginning to engage the rural areas and could provide credits to rural inhabitants within the foreseeable future. The Assessment recommended that development agencies should assist rural areas so as to make them credit worthy. The delivering capacities and the general business climate can be improved if both the formal and the informal financial markets collaborate in establishing a system which would facilitate accountability and savings, as is the case in the urban areas.

**16.21.** There is no data disaggregated by sex on credit availability and usage in the rural areas and in particular with regard to rural women's access to agricultural credit.

### **SELF-HELP GROUPS AND COOPERATIVES FOR EMPLOYMENT**

**16.22.** It is difficult for a woman or group of women to establish self help groups in the rural areas in Liberia. Only men are known for establishing or belonging to self help groups. Wherever they are established there is often a mix of women and men and groups are often male dominated. Sometimes the membership of self-help groups can be exclusively men. According to a study, 9.5% of males compare to 7.0% of females were found to be a member of some kind of self-help group or credit associations.

**16.23.** The study also indicated that rural women hardly established businesses of their own, independent of their spouses. Even in agriculture, which is the main economic activity and which both sexes often virtually engage in on equal basis, income therefore is controlled by the men, thus limiting rural women's opportunity to independently earn and manage their incomes.

**16.24.** Two important points of analysis are: (a) that the cultural practices, particularly as they relate to women are very strong in the rural areas as compared to urban settings; and (b) that if the ratios of participation of both rural and urban women were disaggregated it would reveal a major disparity, which must be narrowed if the participation in community activities in decision making is to be enhanced and made beneficial to women's empowerment.

## HOUSING FACILITIES

**16.25.** There has always been a severe shortage of dwellings in Liberia, particularly, Monrovia. This problem was recognized as early as the 1970s. In order to deal with the problem the Government of Liberia established the National Housing Authority (NHA) in the 1970s. The construction of houses continued until the 1990s when again it had to be discontinued as a result of the war.

**16.26.** It is important to point out that when the NHA was created its focus was on the construction of houses in the urban areas and nothing was said about the rural areas where the majority of the population resides. Providing cheap but good and affordable housing in the rural areas contributes to capacity-building for women.

## WATER AND SANITATION

**16.27.** Liberia has a bad sanitation management problem. There is no organized and effective garbage collection and disposal system. The Monrovia City Corporation (MCC), which caters to only the residents of Monrovia, is unable to adequately manage waste in all urban and rural areas due to the lack of trained staff and inadequate resources.

**16.28.** Poor access to safe drinking water and sanitation services are major causes of illness and poverty. The impact of inadequate drinking water and sanitation services is greatest on the poor. Many people, particularly women and children, fetch water from long distances. In addition, water and sanitation-related sicknesses put severe burdens on health services, keep children out of school, and undermine investment in agriculture and other economic sectors. Access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities fell from 37% and 27% of the population in 1990, respectively, to 17% and 7%, respectively (PRS 2008: 108).

## XVII. ARTICLE 15

- 1. States parties shall accord to women equality with men before the law.*
- 2. States Parties shall accord to women, in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity. In particular, they shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.*
- 3. States Parties agree that all contracts and all other private instruments of any kind with a legal effect which is directed at restricting the legal capacity of women shall be deemed null and void.*
- 4. States Parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.*

**17.1.** Often times in the traditional courts, women are not allowed to appear before the court without their husbands. They are not allowed to sue without their husbands.

**17.2.** Due to this practice, many women (particularly in the traditional society) do not bring their cases to the courts.

**17.3.** This practice is forbidden under the Constitution and law reform and review is ongoing as a deliverable under the 2008 PRS.

### **XVIII. ARTICLE 16: EQUALITY IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE**

*1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:*

*(a) The same right to enter into marriage;*

*(b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;*

*(c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;*

*(d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;*

*(e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;*

*(f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;*

*(g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;*

*(h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.*

*2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.*

## OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

**18.1.** There are two forms of marriages recognized by law in Liberia. This first category or form of marriage is called customary or traditional marriage. The second is called western marriage, Christian or marriage under ordinance. Customary or traditional marriages are prevalent amongst the uneducated and rural people, though a large segment of our literate and educated people have adopted this mode of marriage in the urban areas.

**18.2.** Marriages under the customary law regard women as a property, although this type of property relationship is not a type of ownership which can be adequately explained and linked to the conventional concept of western property ownership. However, as a result of this relationship, women virtually do not have any role to play in the family decision-making process. Instead, their role is clearly circumscribed: they are to bear and bring up children and serve their husbands. A role prescription of this kind obviously put women in a subservient position.

**18.3.** The law provides for equal rights to marriage. To a large extent, men are the ones who propose to women for marriage. However, in the traditional setting, females are being given into marriage by their parents whether or not they consent.

**18.4.** Under the Liberian Constitution, all persons are born equal and have the same rights. However, responsibility during marriage differs from one form of marriage to the other. In statutory marriages, marriage responsibilities are shared based on the understanding of the couples. Unlike the statutory marriage, customary marriage gives more responsibility to the women (caring for the husband and children etc.)

## THE INHERITANCE LAW

**18.5.** The Government enacted an Inheritance Act in December 1, 2003 to govern the devolution of estates of inheritance for spouses of both statutory and customary marriages. This law gives the same property rights of western marriage to traditional marriage. Until this Act came into force, women in traditional marriages were not entitled to property rights. Although this law exists, and the Ministry and other partners are carrying out awareness-raising, most of the women in the rural areas still see themselves as property. There needs to be massive awareness creation especially in the rural areas.

## **XIX. CONSTRAINTS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION**

**19.1.** In spite of its accession to the Convention, the State party recognizes the following constraints and failures which have hindered the Convention's full implementation:

- a) Non-publication and therefore the non-domestication of the Convention;

- b) The absence of awareness and sensitization of the general public in respect of the Convention;
- c) The limited resource capacity of the Ministry of Gender and Development, which hampers its policy, programming and implementation capacity;
- d) Difficulties and capacity constraints in mainstreaming gender across line ministries;
- e) The deficiencies in the health system of the country in respect of the following:
  - quality and equitable ante-natal care and safe obstetric practices;
  - poor reproductive health (RH) information and services in the remotest and inaccessible areas of the country;
  - poor available reproductive and obstetric services;
- f) The high illiteracy rate amongst women, particularly rural women;
- g) Difficulties changing cultural and tradition regarding harmful practices against women in traditional societies;
- h) Multiple constraints and challenges to delivering universal and equal access to education for all its citizens. In particular:
  - Centralized educational system and limited infrastructure
  - Inadequate retention mechanism/strategy to reduce dropout rate among girls
  - High teenage pregnancy rates
  - Cultural limitations on girls' attendance beyond primary school
  - Cultural practices (early marriages, boy preference, Sande Society)
  - Lack of parental guidance and support
  - Lack of trained female teachers
  - Limited number of females in administrative positions within the educational system
- i) Difficulties in coordination across the country to target GBV, leading to duplication of programs, lack of collaboration and challenges in providing holistic services to survivors. Strengthening of the response capacity of field actors (legal aid clinics, counseling, medical supplies, support and care), Geographic inaccessibility of some remote villages in rural areas where GBV survivors are found, Human resource in all sectors;
- j) Resource and capacity constraints in rehabilitating the justice system and women's lack of access to it;

## **XX. RECOMMENDATIONS/WAY FORWARD**

The Government of Liberia hereby presents the following recommendations to continue its mission of eliminating discrimination against women in every aspect of society. While recognizing the great challenges to achieving gender equality, the Government of Liberia also prioritizes women's rights and their important role in the nation's rebuilding, development and growth. The following recommendations stem from this CEDAW report. Many reflect the Government's priorities and policies as they are presented in its three-year Poverty Reduction Strategy, showing that the Government of Liberia is committed to ensuring their enactment:

### *Domestication of the Convention:*

- Publish and domesticate the Convention as is required by Liberian laws and the terms of the Convention. This is to include a robust public awareness and sensitization campaign using every means necessary including schools, civil society, media, and government line ministries.

### *Structures and policies to advocate the end of discriminatory practices and promote women's rights:*

- Enhance the resource and technical capacity of the Ministry of Gender and Development to improve its policies, programs and implementation capacity;
- Work with line Ministries to strengthen the National Gender Forum as the primary body for gender mainstreaming in all Government policy;
- Mainstream gender issues into civil service operations, management and development including a sexual harassment policy for the civil service and an affirmative action program to ensure gender equity in senior levels of the civil service.

*Supporting women's health needs:* The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare will focus on rebuilding the foundations of a functioning health system over the next three years. This is necessary and vital to the provision of appropriate health services for women. Specific actions include:

- Reconstruct midwifery schools in Grand Gedeh and Lofa;
- Train 500 certified midwives and 5,000 traditionally trained midwives in Life Saving Skills;
- Develop guidelines and conduct study on gender to guide all human resources decisions;
- Train and deploy midwives, physician assistance and laboratory technicians in health facilities;
- Expand access to the Basic Package of Health Services with specific target of establishing gender sensitive medical care services in all BPHS facilities nationwide.

*Tackling the problem of violence against women:* Government and partner coordination will be necessary to appropriately care for survivors of violence and to decrease the staggering rates of violence against women in Liberia. The Government commits to:

- Push ahead with its GBV National Plan, including proactive measures in the security, health, education, and justice sectors;
- Undertake a proactive and robust stand against harmful traditional and cultural practices such as female genital mutilation that affect the health of women, working with Traditional leaders and women to formulate the most effective strategy to end these practices;
- Begin the process of building safe homes in the counties to provide holistic services to GBV survivors;

*Supporting women's and girls' education:* Amongst an overall ambitious program to expand access to education, enhance its quality through curriculum reform, and rebuild the failing infrastructure, the Government of Liberia is committed to the following measures for the next 3 years:

- Encourage girls' enrolment (particularly in secondary school) through special scholarship program;
- Target girls' enrolment by providing take-home rations for 30,000 adolescent girls and continuing the feeding program in schools;
- Continue the Accelerated Learning Program and adult literacy programs that have been developed during the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy period.

*Eliminating discrimination in employment and ensuring women have equal opportunities for productive activity and labor in the Liberian economy:* The following are Government priorities under the PRS and together they will work to enhance women's involvement and productivity in agriculture and commercial activities:

- Provide inputs such as seeds, tools, fertilizers, agro-chemicals and agricultural processing equipment to vulnerable groups such as women and smallholders;
- Encourage, promote and strengthen farmer-based organizations as the primary institution for farmer coordination, with particular emphasis on women and youth;
- Establish agricultural and MSME programs such as management training and skills development to create employment opportunities for youth, women and the vulnerable;
- Provide skills training for MSMEs to promote the transition from the informal to the formal economy;
- Launch a Women's Entrepreneurship Program involving MSMEs that will aim to develop business skills, access to microfinance, and functional literacy.



*Ensuring women receive equal access to justice and security:* The Ministry of Justice is taking steps to improve access to justice. Initiatives include:

- The planned creation of the Roving Prosecution Unit to assist in the prosecution of cases in the Counties;
- The establishment of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Crimes Unit;
- Enhancing access to justice across the country by the recommended appointment of qualified County Attorneys, as well as ongoing skills improvement by way of training and developing a prosecution manual, concentrated upon the prosecution of SGBV crimes;
- Continual assessment and work to improve prosecution services.

*Addressing the unique needs of rural women:*

- Establish the National Rural Women’s Program and the appropriate leadership structure through which to channel programs for all rural women. This will fill a current gap of a formal body to represent rural women’s needs and interests in program and policy dialogue;
- Specifically address rural women’s needs in access to justice and GBV services, agricultural training, literacy training, and greater access to health care, as described in above recommendations.

## **XXI. CONCLUSION**

The Government of Liberia, as evidenced in through this report, recognizes the many inequities facing women in Liberia. The State is committed to the necessary actions to end practices of discrimination in Liberian policies, laws, labor practices, social service provision, and the overall society and economy.

Recognizing that the process will be long, the Government is actively working to build the necessary foundation for long term improvements while it implements short term interventions to support women in Liberia’s development process. The Government of Liberia is proud of its National Poverty Reduction Strategy and the inclusion of all interventions listed in the recommendations section to tackle the pervasive discrimination against women In Liberian society.

**REFERENCES**

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Convention on the Rights of the Child Liberia Report

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Foreign Relations Law (Act)

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