

LIBERIA

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE BUILDING AND PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE: COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES



Women around the world face significant challenges to their participation in peace building processes; beyond this, national level legal frameworks around women's peace building or prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) often do not filter down to the community level.

In Liberia, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is undertaking a global program entitled "Supporting Women's Engagement in Peacebuilding and Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict: Community-Led Approaches."

The two-year initiative in Liberia, which was launched in April 2007, is part of a global UNIFEM program funded through a US\$6.5 million grant from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). The following six conflict-affected countries are involved in the program: Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Uganda.

- authorities.
- Conducting training for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Secretariat on women's human rights and gender sensitivity, and supporting women to testify and pursue reparations.
- Increasing the capacity of the police to prevent, respond to, and file reports on SGBV crimes, by supporting women-friendly practices in police stations.
- Establish linkages between health service, psychosocial support, and the police to ensure effective referral systems of SGBV cases.
- Improving women's access to traditional justice through building the capacity of customary institutions to apply international human rights standards to SGBV cases.
- Producing a legal aid toolkit to promote responsiveness and confidentiality by formal justice system officials dealing with SGBV.

ANTICIPATED CHANGES

- Strengthened capacity of select communities in four counties to own and contribute to programme design, monitoring and evaluation.
- Women organized in peace huts influence peace building in their communities.
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is more responsive to addressing SGBV against women during the conflict.
- PRSP and county development plans 2008 to 2012

OBJECTIVES

With a budget of US\$1,063,880, the objectives of the UNIFEM program in Liberia are:

- To support women's capacities to engage in peace building and prevent conflict at the community level;
- To support women at the community level in preventing SGBV and responding adequately to the needs of survivors.

ACTIVITIES

The program is being implemented in selected communities within Grand Bassa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and River Gee Counties. Some of the key activities of this program in Liberia include:

- Using the existing network of women's Peace Huts to strengthen women's capacity to influence peace building in communities, through creating forums for dialogue between women and local



Women's Peace Hut meeting, Margibi County, Liberia

- incorporate issues of women's participation in politics, rights to access and ownership of land and SGBV.
- Increased access by women to medical and psychosocial services for the prevention of and redress of SGBV.
 - Increased capacity of the police in the four focus counties to prevent, respond to and file reports on SGBV crimes.
 - Improved access by women to traditional and formal justice systems.

UNIFEM Liberia partner WONGOSOL, in a survey conducted in Grand Bassa County found out that:

- Domestic violence in the form of wife battering has prevalence rate of 45%, verbal insults 33%, torture or trail by ordeal 5%;
- 39% women have heard about the rape law, 15% men have heard about rape law;
- 65% people hear about rape cases every three months;
- Available services survivors of rape access: 41% police, 39% medical, 10% psychosocial counseling, 4% court or legal redress.

We expect to see wider awareness of the general public about the need for behavioral change to ensure punishment for perpetrators and reduction in various forms of SGBV, increased reporting of rape cases and increased access to a more responsive justice system and psychosocial support for survivors.

PARTNERS

UNIFEM is working with the following partners to implement this program:

- Government of Liberia represented by the Ministries of Gender and Development; Internal Affairs; and Justice
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- International and National NGOs and Networks, such as Action Aid International Liberia; Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL); Women in Peace-building Network; and community based women's organisations

The selection process for additional partners is already under way.

UNIFEM expects that these positive changes will contribute to supporting the women of Liberia in building peace and preventing SGBV at the community level.

SGBV IN LIBERIA

While little information exists on the true extent and severity of SGBV, indicative studies suggest that:

- 92% of 1,600 women interviewed for a 2005-2006 government survey had experienced some form of sexual violence, including rape.
- Rape of minors is prevalent. A recent MSF study at a hospital in Monrovia found that an estimated 85% of the 658 rape survivors reporting to the hospital were aged under 18, while 48 % were aged between 5 and 12 years.

During the war, rape was extremely widespread, and women and girls were also used as 'sex slaves' by combatants. Incidence of rape and domestic violence remain high, with those most vulnerable being women in IDP camps and those living in extreme poverty. Survival sex and sexual exploitation and abuse continue to be issues, especially in urban areas.

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